

HISTORICAL SETTING  
OF THE  
EARLY GOSPEL

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THOMAS CUMING HALL

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# HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE EARLY GOSPEL

BY  
THOMAS CUMING HALL

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## PREFACE

IN these pages the attempt is made to make once more the historical setting of the gospel vivid to our minds. It is exceedingly difficult for us to recover a world in many ways so different from our own, and yet recent historical study has done so much to aid us that the author has tried to sum up the results of the most recent investigations. Before each chapter will be found an indication of the contents, and a few of the books the author has found most useful in opening up the subject farther to any student wanting to more fully examine any topic. The fact that the sources are not given is due to the character of the volume and the desire not to burden the pages with footnotes, but the presentation rests upon first-hand investigation of what literary material exists for forming a picture of the critical times in which the Christian faith took form.

THOMAS C. HALL.

New York, July, 1912.



# CHAPTER I

## THE WORLD THEN AND NOW

### CONTENTS

The undisputed place of Christianity—The need of understanding the inner meaning of the movement—The appeal Paul made to the world—The differences and analogies between the ancient and the modern worlds—The social reconstruction in Jesus's time—The ethical interest of Jesus's time—The political reconstruction going on—The central interest of the early Gospel—Paul and the Roman world.

### LITERATURE

The sources are the books of the New Testament and the literature of the first three centuries, together with the inscriptions recovered from the sands of Egypt. Besides the great classic histories of Rome by Merivale, Mommsen (German and English translation), and G. Ferrero (Italian and English translation), consult S. Dill, "Roman Society from the Time of Nero to Marcus Aurelius," 1905. Ernest Renan, "Marc-Aurèle et la fin du Monde Antique," 3d edition, 1882. G. A. Deissmann, "Licht vom Osten," 2d edition, 1909 (German and English translation). A. Harnack, "Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums," 2d edition, 1906 (German and English translation of first edition). A. Ritschl, "Die Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche," 2d edi-

tion, 1857. E. Tröltsch, "Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirche," 1912. Vol. I. Eusebius, "Church History" (best translation by A. C. McGiffert with notes). A. C. McGiffert, "A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age," 1897. P. Wernle, "Die Anfänge unserer Religion," 2d edition, 1904 (German and English translation). Moffatt, "Introduction to the New Testament," 1910, or one of the "introductions" of Zahn or Holtzmann. Edwin Hatch, "The Organization of the Early Christian Churches," 1881, and "The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church," 2d edition, 1891. L. Friedländer, "Darstellungen aus der Sitten-Geschichte Roms von August bis Antonine," 7th edition, 1901. A. Harnack, "Das Wesen des Christentums" (German and English translation). W. M. Ramsay, "Paul the Traveler and Roman Citizen." G. A. Deissmann, "Paulus," 1911. For the ethics of the period, consult the author's "History of Ethics within Organized Christianity," 1910, Chapters I to IV.

It is now unthinkable that any of the existing religions should again seriously challenge Christianity. No culture is likely now to struggle successfully with the aggressive modern Protestantism of the New World. If any serious mind rejects organized Christianity, it will not, in general, turn to Confucianism or to Buddhism with any genuine hope, and still less to Mohammedanism. The unreality of such



modern versions of Buddhism as that of Schopenhauer is too apparent; the fantastic character of any Oriental claimants is too patent. For the men of to-day, who are trained in the historical method and the experimental laboratory, the question of religion presents itself still as acceptance or rejection of some form of Christianity. And even proposed modern forms of religious organization, like the Monistic Federation of Germany or Christian Science, must take over into their teaching some of the most assured religious and ethical results of Christian history.

Even great social movements, like political socialism or the various forms of organized democratic advance, find they must relate themselves in one manner or another to a great body of doctrine and Christian reflection. It is therefore of deepest interest to try and understand as fully as possible the inner meaning of the Christian faith. That it has not been always understood is not alone the fault of its critics, but also of its defenders. We have altogether too easily accepted the particular forms we hold without asking whence they came,

or what were the special needs that Christianity met in the early days of its struggle. For one of the remarkable things about Christianity was its power of adaptation to these various needs. And although Protestants recognize how quickly and fatally primitive Christianity became merged in the Imperialist movement, and under the papacy mastered the world by a manifold compromise, yet in the midst of all declension and distortion it never wholly lost its great redeeming character nor completely surrendered to the glamour of an enticing tempter.

It is therefore of great importance to get back to the original character of the early Christian Church and to feel again, if possible, the first thrill of its earliest enthusiasm. For to-day we are bringing back the Christian message to that Eastern world from whence it came, and the better we understand its origin and original spirit the less likely are we to make the grave mistake of confusing the essential import of its teachings in their eternal significance with the local and temporary expressions borrowed from its Occidental adaptation.



The teachings of Jesus have proved themselves redemptive in individual lives of all times and all places. Whether in India or China, in the somber glooms of African forests or amid the cold whiteness of the far North, God has appeared to chosen souls in the face of Christ Jesus, and in his life they have beheld God's most splendid glory and known themselves accepted and forgiven.

It now only remains to show that the great national and associated life of men, at present still so far removed from the Christian ideal, can be brought into subjection to the King of kings, and made to reflect the love and tenderness of the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

One of the mastering notes of the early proclamation was the appeal Paul made to the whole world of his day. The vision of the primitive Christian prophet was not that of a few elect souls safe in heaven, but of a fiery judgment and a splendid vindication upon earth of the righteousness revealed in Jesus Christ, and of a world that had once indeed rejected him, but

was now redeemed and purified and sitting at his feet. And again to-day we are thrilled by the vision of a world-wide missionary conquest of all lands and people; of a peace established among nations knowing war no more. He is not worthy of the name of Christian who does not live from time to time in the vision of a new age which faith conjures before our longing eyes; the vision of a world swallowed up in that loving righteousness made so manifest in the life, the sufferings, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. To-day the scientific curiosity of men has made it possible as never before for even the unlearned to enter into something of the heats and struggles out of which emerged Christianity, and to contrast them with our own present position, and to learn of them lessons of transcendent importance. For in spite of all the great differences between our age and that of the young Roman imperialism, there are many profound analogies. We can hardly vividly realize a world without the modern machinery upon which we are so dependent; a world without gas or electricity, without railways or

steamboats; without sugar or coffee; poor even in its wealth, and sunk even in its wisdom in miserable superstitions, and menaced by war and disease in a way now made unthinkable. And yet it was the beginning of our modern world. Greece was giving the intellectual forms in which we still do our thinking. Roman law was laying the foundation upon which all our legal structures are based. The Orient was whispering into the world's ears the stories of mysteries and adventures with which childhood's imagination still is awakened, and Judaism was preparing the way for the cosmopolitan religious movement which was to sweep men of all races into a common and world-wide confederation.

Then, as now, three languages opened practically the whole world to men of education. The Koiné, or Hellenistic Greek, Latin, and Hebrew did for any man of cultivation what English, German, and French do for us to-day. Then, as now, a system of roads linked the world together in close relationship. The tombstone of a Phrygian merchant mentions seventy-two trips to Rome. The passing

of the Roman imperialism in the fifth century seemed for a time to close those highways, but now again the life-throbs of the farthest East are felt in the extreme West. Then, as now, local and narrow religions were being broken down by the mere force of foreign contacts. Men were then, as now, studying the religions about them and the religious passions of the past in the eager hope for light and consolation. Then, as now, men's minds were looking forward, sometimes with fearsomeness, sometimes with brave buoyant courage, facing with gladness an unknown but welcomed future. Orient and Occident faced each other then and very much as they face each other to-day. Then, as now, the Occident felt itself physically superior, but paused in wonder before the teeming populations and the hoary antiquity of the mysterious Orient. Then, as now, new forces—social, political, and economic—filled the authoritative classes with terror and foreboding and the less fortunate classes with sometimes fierce anticipations of the possession of power. Then, as now, and only then as only now, the whole world felt the

pressure of an unformulated code that extended its protection to the stranger, and made even remote and difficult regions places for exploration. As now so then the world had become suddenly mobile. Soldiers of fortune, merchants, craftsmen, missionaries penetrated remotest regions and brought back the knowledge of human ways and customs from afar. And in one further circumstance the age was like our own: it was an age of restless propaganda in both philosophy and religion, because of the breaking down of the national lines that had hitherto defined and decided for him each man's religion. It was a widely cosmopolitan world, filled with denationalized men, and even nations. Economic causes had made the contrasts between poverty and wealth as oppressive as in our own day, and visions of a new era were essential factors in the thinking of at least many prophetic leaders. Hence the study of the setting of the gospel story has especial importance for the interpreter of it to our generation. The New Testament is an intensely modern book.

There are still many unsettled literary



and critical questions, but the moral and religious value of the book is not dependent upon any possible answer to these. The historical gains of the last decade have given vividness and reality to the story contained in these pages. We need indeed to have our historical imaginations quickened, that this wonderful literature may stand out again not only as a voice speaking with authority to the depths of our own souls, but as the record of a divine response to the urgent needs of a great, restless, weary world in those old days ago.

That world was passing through an age of great social reconstruction. Some who tremble to-day in the face of possible important social change would do well to remember that even the setting up of a new socialistic state might conceivably be carried through with less economic change than was involved in the radical transformation of society from a slave-worked state to a feudal system, or the political changes involved in passing from a military and highly centralized imperialism to the balance of nationalities independently sovereign which constitutes the Europe of to-day.

Tremendous are the changes foreshadowed in the pages of the New Testament. Over its story brood the spirits of unrest and social idealism that had spoken so effectively in the lives of the Old Testament prophets. And these same spirits hover to-day over the best of our literature and are inspiring some of the noblest of our preachers. Impending changes all thoughtful men are trying to understand, and although there is no agreement even along what main lines those changes will take place, the air is vibrant with expectation just as in the days when Jesus spoke, and from the seclusion of Galilee made a whole world hear.

Another marked feature of the age of Jesus was its absorbing ethical interest. As to-day so then there was a most far-reaching demand for moral guidance. The old moralities, based upon the authority of outworn creeds and cults, no longer held the thoughtful, and men in all classes were asking, "What is right?" and "Why are these wrongs about us?" As the luxury and frivolity of Julia Cæsar's daughter in Rome set thoughtful, earnest men ask-

ing after some standard for the home, so Herod and his court awoke loud protests not only from John the Baptist, but in the hearts of many classes. The rising sense of revolt against injustice does not always indicate that the injustice has become more pronounced. The patient that is getting well often feels the smart of his wound more than it would be felt in the fever that was killing him. Our investigation may not convince us that the world of Jesus's day was worse than it had often been before, or that it was especially corrupt as compared even with days since; but the world was acutely and vividly aware of its moral state. We find evidences that in Rome as well as in Asia Minor, in Egypt as well as in Palestine, men were awakened to the moral needs of humanity, and were turning to teachers with an almost pathetic eagerness to find the way of life and safety.

Nor are we to get an exaggerated idea of the expectancy of that age. Just as to-day the vast mass of us spend our time in doing the thing that has to be done at the moment; just as money must be earned



and spent; just as the routine of life—eating, sleeping, visiting, with hours of relaxation—swallows up for most of us nearly all the energy at our disposal, so then the village workman did his daily task, the seller sat before his little booth and partly made and partly sold his product. The great average life was not so very different in its gossip and excitement, its interests and its fears, its passing wants and its future hopes from similar life to-day.

Nevertheless, then, as now, the world was bound together in some larger interests common to all. The great Roman state, once a vaguely understood republic, had now launched upon that fateful competition with Oriental monarchy which shook the whole balance of power, and gave rise in the humblest of Eastern bazaars to political speculation as keen as the rise of Japan and the awakening of China excites among us to-day. Moreover, existing class status had been broken down. The “new man” in Roman history had begun to play a part similar to that of the self-made man of our generation. The old sharp class lines no longer kept out

ambitious men from trying to gain the highest kind of power, and the imaginations of the energetic were fired by the accounts of successes on the part of those most disadvantageously placed at birth.

In another respect the German scholar Rhode has shown a curious analogy between the age of the Gospels and our own. It was a novel-reading age. The whole Hellenistic world was fed with romance literature, in which love strove with misfortune and triumphed in spite of perils by land and sea. In these romances all the strange wonders from Babylon and tales from India mingled with the legends of Greece and Asia Minor. We have as one of the latest products the collection of old tales made, indeed, in Cairo, and quite late in its composition, but early in its material—The Arabian Nights Entertainment. These romances appealed to the awakened curiosity of the world of that day, and furnished also a rude ethics, and a constant vision of virtue at last triumphant and the wicked powers crushed and vanquished. Thus were enforced lessons of sentimental ethics, in which the

great primitive virtues of courage, fidelity, shrewdness, patience, humility, faith, and loyal constancy are dwelt upon. These stories appealed both to the imagination and to the youthful ambition. They seem to have created a sort of chivalry, and to have been often a fruitful and effective appeal.

The clash of East and West under Alexander the Great, and then the struggle of Pompey with Cæsar Augustus, flung, as it were, the world into the melting-pot. The struggle threatened the whole balance of power; and not only so, but it began the fierce fight for a new and fundamental adjustment of forces to be carried on under quite new and strange conditions. Like our own age, it was an age of sea power. Not only was Rome compelled to build a fleet for purposes of conquest, but, like England to-day, she felt that unless she held the paths open by which food would reach her she might be starved out in a season. Never again until our own day was command of the sea to play quite the part it played from the destruction of Carthage to the firm establishment of

Roman imperialism. It is most interesting to see that the same economic and political conditions that mark the wars of England with Holland and France for hegemony of the sea, marked also the attitude of Rome to Carthage, Egypt, and all the fleets of the Mediterranean basin. Anyone rising from the reading of Captain Mahan's history of sea power must be struck with the remarkable way in which the Roman struggle has been reduplicated in a larger way upon the Atlantic Coast. Naturally, there are profound differences in method and outcome, but the analogy is at once striking and instructive.

When we read the Gospels the question naturally arises, How far did the man Jesus apprehend the political conditions of the world beyond Galilee? He does not give evidence in the accounts that have come down to us of any special political interest, and yet it would be unsafe to judge too narrowly from the Gospels. His following seems to have come in large part from Galilee, and Simon, at least, was a Canaanæan, or Zealot (Matt. 10: 4; Luke. 6. 15), and with the resistance of the Zealots to

Roman overlordship political leaders had constantly to reckon. So that all the political questions connected with the Roman and Herodian plans must have been the subject of constant conversation and thought among his following. Moreover, John the Baptist had been a dreaded political leader, and the disciples of John and of Jesus had much in common. Then, again, all who know the Orient tell us of the extraordinary way in which news, and particularly political news, circulates in the markets and bazaars which there take the place of the newspaper with us. And many in India, for instance, are astonished at the rapid circulation of any special news and the way in which all seem thoroughly informed. It was natural that the gospel story should dwell less on this side of the early teachings of Jesus, for, in the first place, the political outlook was overshadowed by the expected speedy return of the Messiah; and, secondly, the narrower and more local Jewish hope had been swallowed up in the larger world-wide ambition of the Christian movement. The Gospels, therefore, were written for this



larger world, and concerned themselves most immediately not with the social and political conditions but with the immediate ethical and spiritual life.

He, however, who wishes to understand Paul must understand the Roman world to which Paul preached. The letters enable us to understand something of the struggle that was involved in getting access for the gospel of Jesus to this great and cosmopolitan life; and in them we see the infant Church already struggling with all kinds of compromise and beset by the temptations to which so often organized Christianity yielded. The very fact that Paul's letters are not systematic treatments of any abstract questions, but are addressed to exceedingly pressing concrete situations, compels us to try and understand those situations, and all the light we can gain on them helps us to understand the letters. For instance, it is often hard to say how far Paul remained thoroughly Jewish in his modes of thought, or how far Hellenic culture had influenced him, and yet the interpretation of some of his most important phrases depends upon our answer to

that question. The study of the background of the gospel story may enable us to come to some conclusions that will most usefully influence our understanding of many particular passages of the New Testament.

## CHAPTER II

## THE POLITICAL WORLD OF JESUS'S DAY

## CONTENTS

The place of Judaism in the Roman world—The weakness of Rome—The character of Cæsar Augustus—His part in a religious revival—The part played by Tiberius Cæsar—The military and commercial importance of Palestine—Rome as a national liberator—Her idealism—Her policy—Her services—The numbers of the Roman world—The separation of classes—The Synagogue—Judaism in city life—The divisive character of Christianity—The associated life of the day—The losses of Judaism—The political place of Hellenism—The political influence of the Orient—Egypt and its influence—Christianity and Asia Minor—The town and the early Church—The obscurity of the movement.

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litterarischen Beziehungen," 1902, and "Die hellenistisch-römische Kultur in ihren Beziehungen zu Judentum und Christentum," 1907.

ROME ruled the world, but not without dispute. What we know as Germany remained a turbulent and unconquered menace to Rome's Gallic provinces. Across the mountains of Asia Minor remained a shadow land full of restless dreamers. The internal affairs of Rome were a cause of grave anxiety to thoughtful men. An Oriental imperialism had been forced upon proud, unyielding shoulders, and the autocratic oligarchy had been submerged in its own military successes. The Orient was still restless and only half subdued, and at any moment a strong Oriental leader might rise to undo the labor of years. It was no vain nor impossible vision that floated before the mind of Jesus on the mount of temptation when he saw the world at the feet of an energetic Messiah uniting the East under Jewish leadership, and so dominating the kingdoms of the world. For Jews were everywhere, and formed probably the largest homogeneous population in that complex world. What Mohammed did six

hundred years later would have seemingly been even more easy in Jesus's day, and with genius in command such fanatically religious forces as Mohammed led would have swept the Roman imperialism almost unresistingly away, for that imperialism was as yet but badly knit together. In spite of Augustus and Tiberius, the structure was raw and crude. The plundering of the provinces was not the main weakness. The poor and the weak were used to being plundered, and the possessing classes of the conquered countries were often Rome's ignoble allies in the process. ~~The principal difficulty was that the administration had grown up so loosely that no one knew where responsibility really lay.~~ The appeal to Cæsar really meant an appeal to all sorts of senatorial influences and backstair intrigues. The old agrarian oligarchy had given way to a plutocracy, partly military and partly based upon commercial exploitation. It is absurd to ever speak of Rome as a "democracy," or even a "republic," in our sense of representative government. An oligarchy whose power rested upon inherited political privileges,

and to some extent upon the possession of land, was rapidly being replaced by an oligarchy whose power rested almost wholly upon possession of capital and ability. Rome had not conquered the East without being herself overwhelmingly influenced by the older culture and civilization. Julius Cæsar was accused, Mommsen thinks unjustly, of wishing to use the title *Rex*, or "King," in connection with Rome's foreign provinces, while retaining only the title "Imperator" for his relations to Roman citizens. Certainly Antony had this in mind during his Egyptian adventure, and it was the almost inevitable outcome of ruling Eastern races who knew only kings and had no knowledge of Roman so-called republicanism. In point of fact, the little Jewish community was more nearly a democracy than Rome herself had ever been, and perhaps the almost extraordinary respect Rome had for Jewish feeling was in part due to the resolute democracy she had to face in Palestine. The Herods catered to this Jewish feeling, and bribed and cajoled at Rome to secure permanence for the Idumean throne, and the passage in

Luke (Luke 1. 5), where Herod Antipas is called "king," although he was only tetrarch, shows how readily the Oriental feeling that only a king could rule made its way. Nor was Rome at this time sufficiently homogeneous to resist the new and tyrannical impulses streaming in upon her.

Octavianus, Cæsar Augustus (B. C. 30 to A. D. 14), has been very differently estimated in history. He was not a great soldier, and not possessed of great personal courage at particular military crises, but he was wise, exceedingly insistent upon his ends, and he shared the opinion of many that what Rome needed was a return to the old religion. At Ancyra is preserved to us a list of the temples he built in honor of Jupiter Feretrius, Jupiter Liberatis, Apollo, Julius, Quirinus, Minerva, Jove, Juno, the Lares of the Penates, the Great Mother, and others. He had great regard for temples everywhere, and guarded with special care such memories of the older life as the Sibylline Books. He took quite seriously his office as Pontifex Maximus, and did his best to restore ancient ceremonies and festival days. Moreover,



he understood Rome and the Italian people, and after he had once gained power used it with great discretion, forbearance, and wisdom. He catered to the revived sense of ethical responsibility, and banished even Julia and her court in response to the demands for a purer social atmosphere. His reign was marked by strong ethical and religious longings. The great poem of Vergil is as much a religious poem as Milton's "Paradise Lost," and is to some degree an appeal for a revival of the old Roman religiosity. The art revival of Augustus's age was distinctly a religious awakening. The attempt was to reestablish under fairer forms and in more philosophical and ethical dress the old religious ideals. Men pondered the past and idealized the ancient agrarian oligarchy, whose faith in the gods and goddesses had been so unshaken. That sturdy faith had much resembled the harsh and narrow religious life of the Boers in South Africa. It had, indeed, conserved some great religious values, such as the purity of the home, the independence of the individual, the resolute courage in defense of the com-

munity; but, on the other hand, it was unexpansive, and substantially lacking in all ethical vitality. The expansion of the Roman agrarian community was accomplished largely by force, but a shrewd diplomacy enabled Rome to really graft upon her life the subjugated populations while constantly guarding the supremacy of the oligarchy. But her religious forms were not capable of maintaining the same unique leadership. The curiously uncreative capacity of this Roman oligarchy was nowhere more remarkable than on this field. Hence Octavius sought only to go back and revive old forms, and his instinct led him always to govern along the traditional lines, as far as it was possible to pour the new wine of an ever-expanding military imperialism into the old wine skins of an agrarian aristocracy.

When the stepson of Octavius came to power he followed fairly closely in the footsteps of Julius and Octavius Cæsar. He, however, was bound to go farther in the imperial path, and the world of Roman power in the time of Jesus was still very incompletely coördinated. Of Tiberius

Cæsar (A. D. 14 to A. D. 37) we see no definite traces in the New Testament, save only the general references to Cæsar, yet, without question, Galilee, at least, was seething with discontent, and Rome was far from anxious to awaken the fanatical forces she dreaded so much. Hence Pilate's conduct as described in the Gospel of John may well be an accurate picture of the anxious care a Roman governor had to exercise, lest he be thought ready to sacrifice the interests of the emperor.

Palestine was the shortest land route to so many places that it was important that Rome's authority should be unquestioned. Indeed, the tragic reduction of Jerusalem by Titus was the inevitable outcome of Rome's demand for a complete control of the life along this important highway, binding together East and West, as well as North and South. It had been the policy of Cæsar Augustus to carry on his wars, not by the series of brilliant and unexpected rushes of Julius Cæsar, but by painstaking road-making, and rather slow and tedious fortification of the territory that secured both the food supply and

the possible retreat. In this way Rome politically entrenched herself before making a forward step.

In the time of Jesus Rome was still often hailed as the liberator from local tyranny. The political overthrow of the world would have been impossible if Rome had not everywhere found classes and parties and trading interests ready to co-operate with her in the overthrow of the local ruler or ruling class. Just as Napoleon's military career would have been impossible had he not been hailed by the poorer populations of the countries he attacked as a friend of the new liberty, and greeted by a rising democratic hope, so Rome was still, even under the Cæsars, thought of as friendly to popular ambitions, and an ally against local tyranny and oppression. Of course Rome, like Napoleon, ruthlessly betrayed these trusting anticipations, but again, as by Napoleon so by Rome, the cause of popular liberty was indirectly advanced. Rome's political power was founded upon the suspicions and weaknesses that despotism always produces, and amid these suspicions the weaker



classes found often protectors and advocates, who for their own selfish purpose advanced popular liberty.

It would not do, however, to underestimate the idealistic elements also involved. The poems of Vergil still echo the older idealism, and Cicero as ruler of a province was as unselfish and as just as some of the best English governors have ever been. We recognize the injustice of those who to-day trace Anglo-Saxon missionary enterprise to selfish commercial or political ambition. We feel in our hearts that he who says that slaves were set free by war because New England wanted to get rid of slave competition with the wages system sees only half a truth. And so also we must admit that Rome's political activity was not wholly sordid and selfish. Many of her best minds felt she was called upon to govern as surely and as definitely as many Americans think they are called to rule in the Philippines. True it is that exploitation was almost as sure to follow Rome's annexation of a province as night follows the day, but at the same time it was not by any means always the end

aimed at. Nor would it have been possible to hold the empire together had there not been a constant mingling of altruistic enthusiasm with the baser and more sordid motives. So much was this the case that the literature of the period abounds in rather highflown professions of unselfish motives, much as to-day jingoism dresses itself in the garments of idealistic devotion to great ends.

The policy of Rome was not to destroy the local forms of government, and her law was only so far imposed upon the subdued world as it was needful from her point of view, which was, of course, the necessity of conserving her imperial purpose. However wise this seems on the face of it, it wrought havoc with justice as understood by the proletariat. No matter how weak an under class may be, it establishes certain usages which it is dangerous for the upper class to ignore. These local customs have the force of law. When, however, there are two sets of law, the strong can always choose the law most favorable to their case; and when Rome was behind the law revolt was almost

impossible. The presence of two kinds of law, and the inevitable injustice that arises, is admirably illustrated in the case of the trial of Jesus Christ. Had Jerusalem been autonomous, the mob that cried "Hosanna!" might have protected their Hero from the ecclesiastical oligarchy, which was afraid of the mob, and had to take Jesus by night; or had Rome displaced Jewish law, Jesus could not have been condemned. But the strong ecclesiastical oligarchy found in a combination of local law and Roman force just what it wanted. This same power to shelter injustice under one or other form of law must always prove an instrument of oppression in the hands of the strong.

There was, moreover, only the one exceedingly expensive appeal to Rome, and only the Roman citizen possessed even that. Hence the real effect of Roman rule was, undoubtedly, to break down law and to hand over the proletariat to very doubtful mercy. And in the intrigues of the Herods one sees how slowly Rome worked out any system of local political government and administration.

Nevertheless, Rome was a political suc-

cess. The confusion and anarchy, which gave her an excuse from time to time for interference in the affairs of neighboring realms, were very generally temporary; but they were frequent enough to greatly endanger increasing culture and the ever-expanding commerce of the world. Even in Judæa the strong hand of Rome was needed to keep factions from flying at each other, and the "peace of Rome" was enforced, if not even-handedly, yet with some approach to ideal standards. Imperial social control, as we understand it, was hardly present in even a rudimentary form. Political expansion and the military defense of the central authority tended even to swallow up such organized social control as communities always establish either by law or tradition. Piracy, however, was suppressed, the main roads roughly policed by soldiers, the provinces were compelled to keep the peace, and riot and internal wars were generally put down with vigor and even harshness. The blood of the Galilæans which Pilate mingled with the sacrifice (Luke 13. 1) represented probably just such harsh suppression of northern worship-



ers at Jerusalem, who probably had engaged in some riotous demonstration. Thus also Paul is rescued at Jerusalem by soldiers and centurions (Acts 21. 31) led by the chief captain, who was responsible for outward order. And yet even in such cases local disturbance had probably to have some potential political effect before Rome was willing to interfere. Ephesus could riot in the theater, but the asiarchs, or officials in charge of the festivals, and the townspeople were in danger of being called to account for the disturbance before the Proconsuls (Acts 19. 23-41), when they would in all probability have had to show that it was no demonstration of disloyalty to Cæsar.

Nothing marks the period more than the intense nervousness of the young imperialism. The suspicious Tiberius exiled the Jews from Rome, together with "other Egyptian priests," probably fearing the influence of diverse religious rites upon the unity of the imperial life. And Claudius tried to do the same thing. The origin of this nervousness is easy to guess, seeing the growing claim for imperial divinity, and

the uncompromising attitude of the Jewish monotheism.

Of the numbers in the Roman world at about the time of Augustus it is difficult to speak. It is generally set down with great confidence at about fifty-five millions. But when one examines the data upon which the best authorities have had to found their conclusions one realizes that it is all vague guesswork. There are simply no numbers upon which it is possible to rely. The population may have been as low as thirty millions, or it may have been as high as eighty or ninety millions. It was nearly always the interest of generals to greatly overestimate both their own forces and those of the enemy. For they did not like to be thought weak before the war, nor the inglorious conquerors of weaker forces after the war; and yet almost all guessing has to be done on the basis of military figures, and then further guessing as to the proportion of women, children, and slaves to the fighting force. The whole thing is hopeless. We can only say that war, poverty, disease, and unnatural vice kept the population low, and that the food



supply was probably not sufficient for a population of over one hundred millions, and more likely only sufficient for about sixty millions, which seems the generally accepted guess.

Nor must we too exclusively judge the period from the political point of view. The poorer classes lived about the same life under all political changes. They watched the political horizon from the field and the bazaar, but with about the feelings that a London costermonger marks a change of ministry in England, or a Mulberry Street merchant views a change of political party at Washington. We see the fears and hopes and ambitions of a very small class reflected in the literature of the period and rashly conclude that these were the formative hopes and ambitions of the whole population, whereas the world of literary culture was exceedingly small, and the great mass of the governed class was very poor and very ignorant. The solemn questions that racked the soul of Seneca were not the doubts and difficulties that stirred the ordinary man, or, at least, they occurred to him in

very different form. And the cultured class was the governing class. Politics was the only occupation for a gentleman; even military life was only a secondary function of the ruler. It was expected, indeed, that a ruler could lead soldiers, but it was not his sole qualification. Oratory, knowledge of law, administrative ability were important factors which often outweighed military skill. This small governing class was intensely interested in all legal questions, but it is a great mistake to suppose that the great mass of the population cared in any intelligent way about the constitutional questions which bulk so largely in the pages of the historians.

In some ways the political and social institution of the governing Roman class, of which we know a good deal, plays a much smaller part as a background for the gospel story than the synagogue. And it is unfortunate that we lack much knowledge of the synagogue in Jesus's time which we badly need to rightly estimate its power and influence. Some things may be regarded as settled. The organizing idea of the synagogue was not public worship, but

public instruction and public discipline. It formed in every community a little government within the greater government, and in various degrees its authority was recognized, whether in Rome or Ephesus, or Egypt. The power extended, of course, only over its own members, but this power could be exercised up to scourging and even in some cases life and death. The ban of the synagogue was a fearful thing, cutting off the Jew from all his natural, social, and economic life, and leaving him a very lonely being in a very hostile world.

There is evidence that the synagogue was a most important economic factor. In Alexandria, for instance, the seating was in accordance with the trade of the attendant, and it formed the real basis, apparently, of much financial credit. Politically, it represented the local feeling, and it was a power with which all countries had to seriously count. It spread a net over the whole known world, in which Judaism was playing a most important intellectual and economic role.

The numbers of Jews and synagogues are not easily fixed. Many of the figures

given by Philo and Josephus are open to grave doubt. Tacitus and Josephus both speak, for instance, of the banishment of the Jews from Rome under Tiberius, and Josephus gives the number of able-bodied Jews deported to Sardinia as four thousand, while Tacitus says, "Jews and Egyptian priests." Whether, now, Josephus, who has the support of Suetonius, or Tacitus, is right it is impossible to say. Moreover, the source of the number we do not know. Even in our own day numbers are generally greatly exaggerated, and where in ancient authors we read of "millions" and large round numbers, we must hesitate, more particularly when there is an evident apologetic purpose apparent. Professors Schürer and Harnack have gathered all the data that seem to exist, and Harnack thinks of about four to four and a half millions of Jews about the time of Christ. Nor is it possible, again, to determine how many of these were actually Semitic, for at this time the Jews were making a most widespread propaganda, compassing land and sea to make one proselyte. The wars against Judaism, which culminated in the fall of



Jerusalem, must have cost Judaism much of her political power, and with the rise of the Christian Church the synagogue seems to have been thrown on the defensive and propaganda largely ceased.

Certainly, however, Judaism was a force in the time of Jesus of world-wide importance. In numbers it cannot have been much less than ten per cent of the great centers. It was in a most extraordinary degree cosmopolitan, and was only second to Hellenism in forming the minds of the intelligent classes, and only Romanism and Hellenism ranked higher as a force in the formation of the complex world of that day.

Christianity must have greatly weakened it by dividing its life, and the bitter wars that destroyed Jerusalem were also aimed at the economic Judaism, which was a most important factor both in giving strength to Judaism, and also in determining the hate and envy to which she was exposed. For in those days also the Jew was hated and persecuted. His religion separated him from many of the customs and festivals which bound men socially together. The Greek coming to Rome could keep the

Roman festivals to Roman gods with the utmost cheerfulness and interest, and so entered at once into the world his neighbor lived in. Not so the Jew. Even those who were far from strict Jews could not even intellectually share that world of social joy and fellowship. Hence the Jews were hated as separate, misanthropic, and arrogant. Yet as to-day so then this separation gave them many economic advantages. They gave themselves more wholeheartedly to business; they sought power as the one means of protection against oppression and injustice; they pitted their brains and dogged passive courage and endurance against the brute strength of opposing numbers. They were educated and trained in the school and synagogue, and the long years of crowded city quarters made them, no doubt, as to-day, immune to many infections from which the other populations, recruited from the land, easily fell victims.

The world of Jesus's day was crowded with various separate protective associations. The strangers gathered in various cities under their own national customs, and formed associations which gained some-



times the permission to build temples. The Roman associations even demanded freedom from taxation, and separate legal treatment, as to-day foreign nations demand the same thing from China. The Phoenicians and Sidonians formed merchant guilds, and the Jews did the same. These Jewish associations were grouped about the synagogue, and were more widely spread than probably any other type of association, so that in the time of Claudius persecution was checked by the fears the strength of these partly economic and partly religious associations inspired. Cæsar Augustus had greatly encouraged these associations, and everywhere the Jewish "collegia" were legally sanctioned. Moreover, they from time to time enjoyed special privileges. They were freed from military service in many places, as on Sabbaths they could neither carry arms nor march more than the rabbinical allowance. No doubt they paid highly for these exceptions, but even the power to pay shows the great influence of the associated Jewish life, and their solidarity is shown by the way they did actually see that the poorer brethren were

yet permitted to keep the laws' requirements.

We must also assume that there was a falling away from Judaism then as now. Sometimes it was a deliberate refusal of the religious obligations, sometimes it was an unconscious drift, sometimes it was a convenient compromise and comfortable accommodation to the life about. We need go no further than Josephus and Philo to see how eager educated and cultured Judaism was to commend itself to the influential classes in the Roman world. Nor was this unnatural or unreasonable. On the other hand, however, the pious Jew cherished then, as the Jew in Rivington Street cherishes to-day, everything in his law that kept his children and his women from sinking into the vice and disorder that has always surrounded the poorer Jewish quarters. How grateful must a pious Jew from Russia be for anything that keeps him and his loved ones from too great familiarity with the "Christianity" of the Bowery! The appalling vices of the great Orientalized centers are summed up by Paul in his letter to the Romans, and

pious Judaism saw in their ceremonial exclusiveness not only a barrier, but almost the only barrier between it and the Jewish family. Moreover, then, as now, no doubt he realized that when the Jew became indifferent to his religion he was exceedingly likely to sink into this quagmire and to lose not only his Judaism but his manhood and character. Hence there was a real moral interest in maintaining unimpaired the ceremonial exclusiveness with which he was reproached.

The political importance of Greece was nothing in the time of Jesus. But Hellenism, a conglomerate of Grecian thinking and Oriental modes of life and religion, had overspread the world, and gave to the life of the times we are considering such measure of unity as it possessed. Nor do the sharp disputes and bitter controversies about what seem to us unimportant details really indicate political unreality. The actual happiness and wellbeing of the ruled class depended far more upon the spirit of the local rulers than upon the theories of the central government. The turbulence of Ephesus or of Jerusalem, the

constant danger of riot and disorder, was the one check upon tyranny, but it must often have been an effective check. The taking of Jesus was by night "for fear of the people." Paul could also appeal for protection to the local government, because it was responsible for the order of the town, and any disorder could and would be used by the enemies of the governor to undermine his political influence at Rome. Nor are there evidences lacking that the ready-tongued Greek, with his quick mind and experience in local affairs, was a wily and dangerous critic of the politicians to whom he happened to be opposed. Much also that goes by the name of Roman law is really Greek and bears the marks of the political experience of the town where the Greek had done his best work. In the Greek word *polis* (or "town") as it enters into "political" and "polite" we have an indication of what the Grecian town organization had done for the Hellenistic society in which Christianity took its first roots.

The political influence of the Orient was the main cause of the rise of despotism and personal government. Why it is that the



Orient has seemingly been able to breed only despotisms remains an unanswered riddle. Whether it was slavery, or the economic conditions, or the climate, or the history of all government as rising out of the patriarchal family, and in the Orient never passing beyond it, it remains a fact that the same essential stock evolved relative democracies in Greece, Rome, Gaul, and Germania, but in Asia Minor, India, Babylon, Assyria, and the Orient generally gave rise only to personal military despotisms. The Jewish democracy was also on the way to the same goal, according to the testimony of Amos and Isaiah, when the whole national development was provisionally stopped by the exile, and the democratic elements of the Hebrew life were conserved in a marked degree in its religious organization.

In this "Orientalizing" of the Roman world Egypt had its full share. The ancient culture of Egypt, its magic and learning, its wealth and mystic beauty seem always to have woven a spell about the Northern imagination. Rome seems to have ruled in Egypt with a particularly light hand,

and as to-day it is the model provincial government of England, so it was in Roman days only most gently governed, and apparently relatively well. In the New Testament, beyond the story in Matthew of the flight into Egypt (Matt. 2. 13) we have almost no indication of the great influence Egypt was exerting. But early Christianity through the monastery and neoplatonism was soon deeply and profoundly affected. Priestly government of Egypt was no doubt one of the influences that entered into the imperial compromise, by which a hierarchy struck hands with a military despotism to give government to the world, and that in churchly shape. But the gospel story reflects little of Egypt's life and nothing of her political influence. The same may be said of northern Africa, whose influence was later so great. The gospel story is unaffected, and we have simply no trace of its life in the pages of the New Testament.

The first field for Christianity after it left Palestine was most naturally Asia Minor and Greece. Politically, they were subordinated entirely to imperial Rome, but the local spirit had not been crushed, and



the old urban organization still persisted, and, indeed, persisted to some extent as a model for other lands and ages. After the defeat of Antiochus the Great, in B. C. 190, at Magnesia, it was only a matter of time when Rome should rule supreme; but the advance was slow, and when at last Pompey defeated Mithridates the Roman Senate (B. C. 63) only made Bithynia-Pontus in the North and Cilicia in the South provinces. But these were the keys to the whole of Asia Minor. The independence of Galatia, Cappadocia, and Lydia was merely nominal. This was then the political bond between Rome's Western conquests and her Eastern dominion. And through this highway passed back from the East the great religious impulses of Judaism, Christianity, and, ultimately, Mohammedanism. The period of prosperity and peace for this high plateau, an exceptional period in its history, was the time when Christianity was born, and its rapid spread over the Western world was made possible only by the circumstances of its political dependence upon Rome. From the close of the sixth century of our era to the present, war and subjection

to merely predatory forces have reduced it again to the wild and uncultivated condition in which successive nomad and military forces had found it before Greece and Rome gave it temporary prosperity through Hellenistic culture and Roman peace.

Alexandria in Africa and the cities of Asia Minor were important formative factors in the final institutional Christianity that became the official religion of the world. The local provincial government is seen in the episcopal forms so soon taken over by the Church. In the Revelation to John the messengers of the various churches of "Asia" are the representatives of the churches in the Roman province, which embraced at that time the western part of Asia Minor and the islands of the west coast. Nor could a more favorable center be found for reaching the world than these cities. The gospel might be swallowed up in cosmopolitan Rome, but in Smyrna and Ephesus centers were formed through which was to pour the tide of life flowing from East to West and back again. In these cities the small Christian communities

learned the art of organization and of government. The episcopal forms which early became fashionable were a mixture of the Jewish synagogue and the provincial and urban governments. Of course these forms had slowly to be adapted to the growing and changing needs of the rising Church, but the provincial interorganization, and the general outline of the city supervision of all the churches in one city bear the marks of provincial experience, and reflect a good deal of the aims and character of these communities of Asia Minor.

Such was the general political situation at the time that Christianity was born. No one could predict its political significance; at the same time all religion in those days had a local, national, or international political significance. And between the lines of the Gospels and in the chapters of the Acts of the Apostles we see the political jealousy at once aroused. The primary cause for persecution was this political meaning that religion then always had, and only the relative feebleness and insignificance of the early beginnings could save it from extinction. This obscurity is, how-

ever, abundantly evidenced by the entire ignoring of the movement by educated and literary men of the Roman and Hellenistic world. To us in the light of what has happened Jesus and Paul are great and important figures, but what significance could two obscure Jews have for the proud, prosperous classes of Rome? It is absurd to lay great stress upon the silence of literature in the matter of early Christianity. Even now we are only beginning to take an artistic and literary interest in humble life, and in the time of the Cæsars humble life had no place to speak of in art or literature, and early Christianity was wholly found among men and women more or less identified with the humble classes. What do we know of Mithraism from classic authors? And yet this was a movement under their eyes of transcendent importance for the army and the nation.



## CHAPTER III

## THE ECONOMIC WORLD OF JESUS'S DAY

## CONTENTS

The attitude of the early Church toward wealth—The class to which the gospel made its first appeal—The classes of that day—The slavery of that day—The freedman class and its rise—The persecution of the Christian Church—The financial strength of the Church—The purity of the early Church examined.

## LITERATURE

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THE attitude of the three early Gospels toward the possessors of wealth has been much discussed of late. The Gospel of Luke has generally been regarded as the

one most distinctly proletarian in its sympathy, whereas Matthew seems to soften the sayings of Jesus as given by Luke. Luke says, "Blessed are ye poor." Matthew says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Luke says, distinctly, "But woe unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation." Whereas in the series of woes pronounced by Matthew (23. 13-33) the contrast is not between the rich and poor, but between the persecuted Church and the scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites. At the same time not too much should be made of this difference in the face of the obvious attitude of Matthew, if not toward the rich as such, yet toward the class possessing authority. In the letter of James the tone toward the rich as such bears witness to two things: first, the predominantly humble character of the early Church, and, secondly, the fact that early some rich followers were found among the poor. God had chosen the poor who were rich in faith, and rich men had oppressed them and drawn them to the judgment seat; at the same time the presence of rich men is frequent enough in the assembly to make



the cringing to them an evil that had to be rebuked. And the letters of Paul bear witness to the fact that some had houses large enough to form centers for the church to assemble in; although anyone knowing how Orientals can crowd into a room will recognize the fact that the demands for mere area are far less in the Orient than with us. In the Acts of the Apostles the picture is of rich and poor, with the rich, however, sharing in primitive communistic fashion with the poor. That early "some of Cæsar's household" were counted among the Christians does not tell us much until we know just what places they had in Cæsar's household. Paul's letter to Philemon, one of the most beautiful in literature, shows that one early Christian not only had a house large enough for the "assembly," but was rich enough to own a slave.

The question, then, arises, To what class did the appeal of the cross come with most force? The discussions called out by Deissmann and others point to facts that seem to indicate that the gospel came first to the small craftsman, and the wandering artizan, often of Jewish

race, sometimes of Jewish faith, but only as a convert, and often as a Hellen or Syrian or member of that great denationalized mass of men whose analogue is found to-day in the Turkish empire. Roman wars had set hundreds of thousands adrift, and Roman peace enabled many of these to follow their trade in a restless search for economic advantage.

In this connection we must entirely displace from our mind the class divisions of our own day. The crowded bazaars were not only selling shops but the workshops in which the things sold were made. As to-day in Cairo, Jerusalem, or Constantinople you can wait and see a fez, or pair of shoes, or a garment made before your eyes and then bargain for its possession, so the whole of the manufacture of the world was linked at once with its use or exchange. Commerce was, indeed, in manufactured wares, as well as in raw materials, but manufacture purely for exchange and exportation was almost unknown.

Nor was agriculture as sharply separated from craftsmanship as to-day. Each peasant village was a self-sustaining unit, as it

is even now, for the most part, in India and the Orient. The fact that Joseph was a housebuilder does not imply that he was what we understand by that term, but may mean simply that among the farming peasants he was the housebuilder, as another was the blacksmith, and another, perhaps, the weaver. Peasant Europe in some places presents to-day a state of affairs not very different. Jesus's figures are drawn not from the small crafts but from the fields and the activity of a peasant, or a fisherman; and in his pictures the "King" is the superlatively powerful person we find in the peasant tales of all lands.

This would imply that not even slaves early entered largely into the Christian Church, although, as we see from Philemon, and Paul's early advice to slaves, some were soon attracted. At this time slavery presented two aspects strongly contrasted, as in the Southern States just before the Civil War slavery also meant two things entirely different in their inner significance. We may call them "luxury slavery" and "exploitation slavery." The household servant of the very rich had no doubt many hard-

ships. He was liable to punishment, often very severe, and was in no sense master of himself. But, on the other hand, he was sure of food and shelter, generally of a far superior kind to the poor laborers and craftsmen about him. As in Virginia, in the fifties, this slavery was probably desperately unprofitable. It was a luxury only a few could afford, and ended often in emancipation as a reward for good service, or that the owner might gain the reputation of being a good master. The enormous freedman class in Rome rose in part out of this desire of patrons to be politically powerful in the slums and stews of the great city, and a study of slavery in the pages of the Roman versions of Greek plays shows that in Athens and Rome the same forces were at work which thoughtful men have pointed out in American history.

One great difference, of course, separated ancient slavery from American bondage. The slaves were substantially of the same race and color as the master class. Hence arose in "exploitation slavery" a difficulty less felt in the cottonfields of the South. For the purpose of industrially exploiting

a fellow man slavery is not economically advantageous. The master must maintain the slave, and driving him at his work requires constant and expensive supervision. Where "gangs" can be handled by an overseer, whether on the cottonfields of the Southern States or on the great "latifundia" estates of Rome, he may perhaps be economically employed, but the small slave craftsman whose skill is his own cannot be really supervised successfully. Hence the wage relationship was rapidly supplanting the slave relationship as a method of economic prudence, and the freedmen were largely skilled craftsmen from whom pride and hunger could get a great deal more work than the demands of a master.

Many evidences point to this class as the one in which Christianity gained its earliest victories. These men were poor, despised, and yet intelligent; and they were the coming masters of the world. While wars and feuds played havoc with the aristocracy and decimated the plutocracy, the ever increasing freedman class, led and taught in many instances by the Jews—one thinks of Paul



as a tent-weaver—was increasing in economic power, and was soon to grasp after political recognition. And although the class as a class was poor, individuals in it rose to wealth and influence and these seem often to have put all they had and all they were at the disposal of the religion that had claimed them. Moreover, this class could and did travel widely. Their tools were simple, and wherever they went it was an easy matter to establish a shop and workshop. Thus Paul supported himself by the work of his hands and was not chargeable to his early converts. And to drift from city to city and place to place became easy for the followers of the cross, who gained new converts wherever they went.

At the same time this class did not correspond to our proletariat of relatively unskilled or only narrowly trained labor. It was not a “factory,” nor “a mining,” nor an “unskilled day-labor” class. Many of its members must have had considerable capital and have employed many subordinates. It was probably painfully lacking in any sense of class solidarity, and one of the benefits conferred on it by Christianity

was a sense of organized solidarity, such as gave the class final power under Constantine.

Could we think of the Dutch farmers of South Africa expanding and conquering the world, and establishing an agricultural aristocracy with a slave contingency, we would have in many respects a picture of the Roman world before it was more or less completely "Hellenized" and "Orientalized." That such a community should look out on the culture and wealth of the older Orient with covetous desire for its possessions, spiritual and material, was only human. Moreover, Italy was rapidly becoming dependent upon Egypt and the rest of North Africa for food and raw material. This triumphant agrarian aristocracy never seems really to have embraced Christianity. It not only was itself conservative, but even the "new men" who joined its ranks were made conservative by its atmosphere and traditions.

It has often been pointed out that Rome never really originated anything. Carthage taught her road-making and Phœnicia and Greece navigation. Her art and literature

were taken from Greece, and even her boasted law was far more the product of Grecian reflection than Roman originality. She had, however, the capacity for wide and discriminating assimilation. As conquest ceased gradually to supply the slaves and riches the aristocracy needed for its increasing luxury, Rome had not the capacity to evolve a new and more fruitful method of production. The fall of the Roman aristocracy was, therefore, an economic necessity and only a matter of time. The new Jewish-Hellenistic craftsman class, made up of freedmen of all nationalities, was evolving a new industrial guild order; and these guilds were dominated by religious hopes and held together in religious bonds. It is becoming more and more evident that the religions introduced widely from Egypt, Persia, and the Orient were highly organized protective communities, and that Mithraism, and the Cybele mystery, and other religious sects were economic brotherhoods and the forerunners of the religious guilds of the Middle Ages. They organized the economic life of soldiers, craftsmen, freedmen, and the float-

ing town populations. Chief among these forces was Christianity. It was more than an emotional religion; it was a new brotherhood with a new economic life. Thus the second letter to the Thessalonians early begins the long series of admonitions to work which we find all down the early Christian literature. He that did not work was not to eat. Thrift and self-maintenance became the cardinal virtues for the growing freedman class, and slowly the power of the class was evolved from the growing prosperity of this new industrialism. And as it grew in power the organization of the Church made its sense of solidarity increasingly a political as well as an economic factor of the first importance.

Already in the Acts of the Apostles we see the economic organization, with its care for widows and its provision for the poor and the wandering brethren, taking shape. It is a misinterpretation of the whole situation to call this by the name of socialism or communism. It was simply the expression of a strong sense of group solidarity with a certain primitive group communism as an ideal, never, however,

fully realized or capable of realization. This world, we must always remember, was very poor. Wealth is always the power to tax, and this power may rest upon the ownership of the bodies of men (slavery), or of the land they must use (feudalism), or of the producing machinery (capitalism), or of the political machinery by which they are ruled. At the same time the wealth of the taxing class is dependent upon the producing power of those taxed. And in the world of Jesus's day that power was very limited; hence the power-possessing class that owned the political machinery, the army, and the civil officials, as well as the land, even when it ground the producing class most, could never exceed a certain pressure without producing revolutionary despair.

It is not difficult to guess the motive that led to the persecution of the early Christian Church. It was not religious intolerance such as we find in the Middle Ages; it was jealousy of the economic and social power that the new organization quickly evolved. The solidarity of the empire was threatened. The emperors strove to establish on the



basis of an imperial cult a new kind of national or imperial unity. The main hindrance was this new religious guild, or brotherhood, cosmopolitan in character, strong in its religious enthusiasm and its ethical purpose; it was, in fact, the statesmanlike and far-seeing rulers who saw the danger and attempted by force to suppress the Church as a growing menace to the empire.

Of course religious fanaticism was aroused, and no persecution is wholly on one ground; local dislikes, race jealousy, prejudices of one kind or another must be appealed to. When, however, we face the curious question, Why was Christianity persecuted and Mithraism, for instance, let alone? the most obvious answer is this freedman class character with its economic meaning. The other cults perhaps claimed no such exclusiveness as did Christianity, but that is hardly sufficient in itself to account for the hostility. When we realize, however, that Christianity was organizing this new economic force in the empire, and that the thrift and industry, for which soon Christians became noted, was making

this class increasingly powerful, we have a motive strong enough to account for the long series of outbreaks in all parts of the Roman world against Christianity. The aristocratic character of the attempt of Julian to restore paganism after the compromise with Rome, and the well-known facts of pagan survival in aristocratic circles long after the nominal triumph of the church, point us back to the beginnings, where we see emphasized, not, indeed, the proletarian but the thrifty freedman character of the movement as over against aristocracy.

This accounts also for the long silence in literary circles in regard to Christianity. It was not on the horizon of a class that, however lowly in its own origin, catered almost solely to the power-possessing upper class. Persecution no doubt made the Church still more mobile, and the doctrine and church organization were spread and even strengthened, gaining in the very fires of persecution a cohesion and unity which no other rival cult possessed. Moreover, in a military society, with an aristocracy corrupted and depraved by wealth and

tyranny, and a slave population degraded and weakened by the conditions of its subjection, together with a frightfully ignorant and debased proletariat, a freedman church with growing means, and an ever-expanding constituency, giving systematic religious and ethical instruction and supervising the morals and industry of its membership, was bound to become the dominant factor in the situation.

The admirable organization of the Church rendered it also financially strong. It could send large sums to the "poor saints" at Jerusalem, and easily maintained its own poor, ministered to its own sick or in prison, and this bound together one class at least in the face of coming storm.

It is thought that even in the time of Constantine the Church had obtained influence over only about ten per cent of the empire's population. But in such a heterogeneous mass, with so much that was weakening and demoralizing, the young Christian Church, with all its faults, came as a deliverer in matters of body, soul, and mind, for the admonitions not only to love one another, but to win converts by loving

helpfulness, though often obscured or even forgotten, were never wholly missing in the preaching of the early Church. The sense of solidarity was increased by persecution and opposition, and secret signs and passwords, as well as letters from well-known bishops and leaders, gave assurance to the wanderer that wherever there were Christians he could appeal to them with certain hope of help.

This was early abused, and even in Paul's time, or shortly after, it was necessary to warn those who would not work that they should not eat. The early literature abounds also in directions for guarding against imposture and corruptions of the faith by wandering and unauthorized teachers. And we see here also a motive for strict guarding of the faith. Orthodoxy was not a purely intellectual interest; few had, or even now have, an intellectual interest in theological questions as such. But unity was a very vital interest, and all heterodoxy was divisive, and so weakening. The very economic strength of the organization was involved. Hence we very early (in John's letters) find formulæ by

which to separate those who are to be received and loved as brethren from those professing to be Christians, but not really yielding to the authority of the Church.

As the Church grew stronger and more powerful complaints are heard that its purity was suffering. But these complaints, though no doubt based upon facts all too serious, yet must be somewhat carefully reviewed. The Church, as we see from Paul's letters, was never pure either in morals or doctrine. The ideals placed before these freedmen could only partly act upon their lives, and only slowly organize them. No doubt conformity to formulæ and loud and sincere professions of belief did duty then, as always, for conduct and atoned for moral laxness in certain circles. And increasing prosperity has its own special dangers. So we early find covetousness rebuked and lovers of money seem from the early literature to have very soon corrupted the early generosity. The almsgiving of the Church then assumes a quasi-official form, and we find even in Acts complaints about the administration and an official organization to remedy the evil.



The picture in first Clemens of a Christian Church is no doubt rather ideal than absolutely true, but it reveals a relatively prosperous and peaceful organization. Soon the treasury of the Church is a source of strength. Each Lord's Day (1 Cor. 16. 2) the collection was taken and distributed in the name of the Lord to those in need. Since persecution might at any time rob the family of the breadwinner, it is no wonder that the early Church sought eagerly to make all feel that at least the widows and children would be cared for by the love of the brotherhood. Nor was it a small factor in the growing solidarity of the young Church that one congregation sent aid to another when need came. So Paul collected for Jerusalem, and so when persecution swept over one province others came to the rescue of the persecuted with alms and money. Thus, as the growing prosperity was seldom checked by universal persecution, nowhere could the Church be stamped out because of the support that always came from some region that was spared. This growing economic prosperity must be remembered because it explains

two things: first, the jealous hate of the persecuting community, and, secondly, the rapidly growing influence, which was out of all proportion to the numbers of the faith.

One last thing also needs emphasis. The basis of the prosperity of the freedman class was handicraft and skill in the trades. Hence it was impossible by persecution to do more than drive this skill away. And just as Judaism in the Middle Ages never could be persecuted beyond a certain point because its services were too much needed to be dispensed with, so the small Christian communities could never be really wholly broken up. They were becoming daily more and more economically necessary. Upon this usefulness all the early apologists lay emphasis; and it accounts for the fact that times of bitter persecution because of economic jealousy were followed by times of protection and encouragement because of the indispensable character of their services. And as Christianity by its preached morality eliminated economic waste of all sorts, the Church grew stronger and stronger day by day.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE RELIGIOUS WORLD OF JESUS'S DAY

## CONTENTS

The polytheism of the period—The test of truth in those days—The place of fear in religion—The rising influence of the Orient—The mystery-worship—Its relation to ethics—Its final goal—The asceticism of the age—The Messianic vision of Judaism—The belief in demons—Luxury and corruption—The stoic reaction—The common attitude toward religion—The Jews and the religions of their day.

## LITERATURE

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It is now time to glance at the religious world of Jesus's time. The researches of such scholars as Harnack, Deissmann, Dietrichs, Cumont, Wendland, and others have thrown a flood of light upon this most absorbing theme. Much still remains to be made clear, but the outlines are now fairly plain. Polytheism has as at least one of its roots the coming together of small groups or tribes, with each a particular tribal god. The strongest group contributes the leading divinity, and the others become either secondary gods or sink down to demons, heroes, or spirits. Sometimes the leading gods are so alike in all but name that they are worshiped as one god under different names, or actually absorb one another. In the rapid spread of the Roman empire it was not possible for this process of assimilation to bring any kind of unity into the thousands of different worships. Rome had to be catholic and accept all religions on some

sort of a compromise. Some worshiped the gods of the land they lived in. Some brought their home gods with them to any strange land they visited. Some sought to identify all the various gods with their native deities. Others tried to discover the powerful gods and to worship them. But the general result was confusion for the common mind and a vague, increasing skepticism for the more intelligent, with some attempt at philosophical adjustment by a very few.

For the vulgar mind even to-day the ordinary test of truth is "what everybody says." And fashioned into a formula, this reads, "what all men everywhere and always have believed." Even Scotch philosophy thought that if it could find a few things everybody believed it would have a fulcrum for the lever of knowledge. Hence it happened that in the time of Jesus the religions of the world were in a state of wild confusion because there were no universally accepted gods and no bodies of beliefs upon which all could agree. The world was not irreligious. On the contrary, it was "too religious," and terribly afraid of not worshiping some god who



ought to be worshiped but remained unknown, hence altars to "unknown gods," for fear of the wrath of a forgotten or neglected deity. Even the most intelligently skeptical were dreadfully superstitious, and fear mingled with all worship. There is no evidence that religion begins with fear. It has its roots no doubt in a sense of need and feeling of awe and reverence before the unknown and mysterious. On the other hand, all primitive religion seems linked with joy, feasting, dancing, harvest festivals, new moons, and good cheer. But fear has a place that as religion becomes degraded soon endangers all else.

The confusions of the Roman empire, however, laid especial emphasis upon fear. The gods a group in Asia Minor worshiped, for example, found themselves opposed by the terrible gods of Rome. When in battle they were overthrown, what was to be the attitude of the worshiper? If he still worshiped beaten gods, would not Rome's powerful friends pursue and punish him? If he changed over to Rome's gods, how would his own gods deal with him? Was he sure of protection from their just anger?

Trembling compromises filled the Roman world. Judaism had faced this awful question at the time of the exile. Many had no doubt fallen away to the gods of the conqueror, but a chosen few had found deliverance in the faith that Jehovah was the only true God, and that even in despair and misfortune he would never wholly desert his faithful follower nor deliver him up wholly to his foes. And in this increasing faith in one God Judaism survived the shocks of conquest, and in the survival and prosperity of the synagogue found evidence for their faith. Then in the synagogue and under the divine teaching of Jeremiah and the school of Isaiah men learned God as an individual experience, and came to trust him beyond all the storms of life and fate (Job).

But for many reasons Roman paganism and platonic philosophy could not thus take men by the hand and lead them out of the mists and fogs of polytheism. One like Plutarch could rest in his little Greek village and find platonic defense for the Delphic mystery worship that he loved, and honestly feed his soul with the religious

values of the past in which he dreamed and brooded, but the average man was tossed and wearied by the rising storms of disputation and found little rest in the vast structures of polytheistic faith.

As antiquity was for the common mind the only test of truth, men sought readily the stores of Eastern lore. Egypt and India, Babylon and Persia were old beyond all computation, and there religion had ever thrived. Even the glories and conquests of Greece were young in comparison. So it came about that to the polytheistic confusions of Rome, Greece, and Asia Minor were added the mystery religions of Babylon, Persia, India, and Egypt. How much early Greece took over from the Orient it is now impossible to definitely say, but Phœnicia and Asia Minor had been the paths by which Oriental wisdom had found its way early into Greek life. The mysteries may even have had a native soil upon which they grew. The leading characteristic of the mystery worship was sacramental initiation into the actual divine life. In the mystery the worshiper came into direct contact with the life of the god

and learned the secrets of the world above and below.

The mystery-worship seems also to have been cosmic in character; that is to say, it aimed at giving a complete view of the world. It explained evil, taught the real meaning of springtime and harvest, vested the stars with their true significance, and gave men and women a point of view from which to see all life. In general, this explanation dealt with the contrast between light and darkness, between spirit and matter, and seems generally to have followed the lines of a dualism between flesh and spirit, in which the flesh is the lower principle of evil and the spirit the divine and permanent reality.

Thus into mystery-worship seems to have come the ethical. It was a method of purification. The grosser dross of the flesh was laid aside, perhaps, for a little in mystic rapture and the spirit communed undefiled with the eternal Spirit of purity. The initiated one was taught a new life of holiness and of divine purity. In sacred song, in sacramental meditation, in solemn ritual he could renew his spiritual life and

prepare for the final sloughing off of the body and eternal entrance upon the life of the gods; for the worship of the mysteries seems to have had this also in common—that the end was redemption of the individual soul in an after life. That Judaism had no doctrine of immortality seems absurd. In the face of stories like the Witch of Endor, and expressions like the close of Isaiah, it is impossible to believe that any period of Judaism was without definite doctrine of an eternal unseen world for the soul. At the same time this was never the center of interest in prophetic or Levitical Judaism. Here the mystery-worship is in great contrast with Judaism. It was an individual extrication from the evils of the flesh that seems to have been the fairest promise of the mystery religions, while for Judaism the redemption was of the world and the nation as the triumphant outcome of Messianic intervention. It is hardly fair with our scanty material to dogmatically assert that the redemption of mystery-worship was rather mechanical and magical than ethical and religious, but certainly this seems to have been prevailing



the case. In strong contrast with the teachings of the Old Testament or the ethical philosophy of the Stoics, salvation was made rather a magical physical cleansing than an inward moral regeneration.

These cults had one great message for the age. They disassociated the religious life from geographical boundaries. The Mithra cult was the religion that caught the attention of the Roman soldiers, taken as they were from every clime and nation. Anyone going to Wiesbaden may see the little Mithra chapel in the midst of the Roman camp at the Saalburg, with the rock chapel, the sky and stars, and the bull slain by the hero-god. The labors of Cumont have given us almost all we can know from the rock inscriptions and constantly repeated symbols of this Mithra cult, but the early Christian writers describe it in terms that show how its life became in many ways the model from which a young and energetic Church took what it could use for its own purposes. Tertullian holds Mithras worship up as a warning, and yet marks it as in some sense like Christianity, only it is a "perversion of

demons.” It was never popular in the purely Hellenic world, but probably only because that world was already preëmpted by other mystery cults, like that of Cybele, the Eleusinian Mysteries, the Magna Mater, and many that we know nothing of, obscure cults whose very names are uncertain and whose tenets are utterly unknown.

In all, however, men sought a “mediator”—some one who at once revealed the divine life and gave assurance to the initiated that knowledge, truth, and salvation might be his portion. In varied degrees the condition of obtaining these things was moral conduct, and, in general, was linked with some sort of asceticism.

This too was a note of the religious world of that day. Men sought salvation or holiness in asceticism. The holy man was one who had subdued the body. Where this came from it is now impossible to say. Asceticism, as meaning separation from the body and its passions, was foreign to the early religion of Greece, Judaism, and Rome. In Egypt we come upon the sources of it as it entered into Roman Catholic Christianity, through the work of Atha-

nasius; but it came also from the East, India or Persia, and linked itself readily to any type of pronounced dualism. Asceticism may be understood broadly as simple self-control, and moral exercise leading to such self-control. In this sense all men are ascetics who attach any importance to self-mastery. But historically asceticism means more than that. It is based upon the belief that the body is vile and all its functions evils, and that purity can be obtained only at the expense of the body. Thus the world of Jesus saw men ready to crucify the flesh by various fastings and exercises, by celibacy and the life of the hermit and anchorite. Early Christianity was too thoroughly linked with Judaism and the Old Testament to have much interest in such a view of life. It was too full of the joy and freedom of the forgiven life, the free grace of God, the love of the Father, and the sense of present fellowship with God in Christ Jesus to be much troubled by asceticism. Paul felt the danger, however, and in Galatians, Colossians, and Ephesians guards the Church from it by laying down the first principles of

Christian freedom, and the real significance of the life in Christ.

Around the Church, however, there was the atmosphere of a pronounced asceticism. Men's hearts were filled with the fears and confusions of a dying economic world. Oppression and injustice bred despondency and "other-worldliness." This world was hopelessly evil, and peace could be found only in entire renunciation of it, and flight from the whole world of sense. It is impossible to say how far India and Buddhism had a direct influence. The contacts were more constant than was once supposed, and Buddhists wandered all over the world. At the same time it may easily be that the same circumstances produced the same results, and that this despondent asceticism was the product of the disordered world rather than the preaching of the Buddhist missionaries. Even on Judaism it had its effects and, as far as we know anything of the Essenes, they represented within its borders the influence of this kind of thinking.

The despondency of Judaism took other forms. The old visions of a Messianic

wholesale judgment upon an unworthy world filled men's imaginations. It was, indeed, dangerous to freely announce the coming disaster, but in cryptic phrase and in an apocalyptic imagery that had become, evidently, almost stereotyped men spoke of the sureness of the coming doom, and even tried to read the signs of the times, and predict the very day of its coming. In Matthew and in the Revelation of John we have the language of these warnings. The literature must, however, have been very extensive, but as it was secret and even forbidden literature, it must mostly be lost to us.

It was a demon-haunted world, and much of its religion must impress us, as much Indian religion to-day impresses even thoughtful men, as really devil-worship. The half-dethroned gods were everywhere. Men were possessed of devils, and mental disorders seem to have been frightfully common. Exorcism was the function of all really potent religious teachers, and fear mingled with even the most outspoken skepticism. Even those who tried, like the Platonists, to rise to a higher



philosophic monotheism found that they must make some place for these lower agencies. And so arose the neo-platonists in all their varied forms. Gnosticism felt it had the cosmic secret of the universe. It taught in many tongues and under many forms the one lesson of knowledge and enlightenment as the one hope of the disrupted world. But its own language was the confused mingling of Orient and Greece with elements from Judaism and Egypt. It had a speculative monotheism, and taught under various names a mediator and saviour who was to come and enlighten men. This mediator was "Reason," and in Jewish Gnosticism figures as "Wisdom," or, in the Hellenistic Gnosticism, as "Sophia," or the "Logos." Thus men like Philo tried to reinterpret the ethical monotheism of Judaism into the language of this poetical mixture of religion and cosmic speculation. It sought to make real to men the fact that God was not the author of all man's misery and of the world's great darkness. It was an attempted defense of God against those who saw in man's misery an evidence that God

was evil and not good, was darkness and not light. It tried to gather up into itself all the wild longings of human hearts baffled and perplexed and to still them by the promise of deliverance at last through mystic entrance into the cosmic process and by revelation of its most secret and hidden significance. Alas, we know Gnosticism, in most part, only from the works of its critics and often far from impartial antagonists. Much sounds weird and strange to our ears. The world was all mapped out, and the circles and spheres of the heavens given their mystic meaning. It was a "science falsely so called" the Pauline phrase for it seems to say, and it evidently had an outer and an inner meaning, which permitted intelligence to fill up its phrases according to its capacity, but which emptied the world of moral values for all too many and filled the place with high-sounding phrases and with empty words. That it was both wide-spread and a dangerous rival of the gospel is seen in the letters ascribed to Paul and the pastoral Epistles, as well as in the fourth Gospel, where John carries on a running polemic against it and its

attempted seizure of the gospel and separation of it from the historic figure of Jesus Christ.

It was a world full of clamorous voices calling to men and women to believe this or that, to accept this or that. It was full of prophets and teachers and sophists, of men and women with sects and enthusiasms, with cosmic theories and wondrous revelations. Ignorance jostled with very high intelligence, and the total lack of all historical background or of any critical system left all men to take or leave much in accordance with the whim of the moment or the loudness of the claimant for a hearing. The dialogues of Lucian are full of the biting flings of a superficial and unsympathetic skepticism, and yet even in his pages we see reflected the pathetic eagerness of ignorant men and women to find some divine voice to which they might listen, and some message from the world of unseen mystery to give them surcease of sorrow. From the unsatisfied longings of that age we may turn with something of pain to a simpler age of quiet contented superstition and obedient religious routine.

And many longed to go back to such an age, but that was impossible forevermore.

The extravagance, however, of a small class in the community was corrupting the manners and the morals of all. Men began to wonder whether, after all, riches were everything. Freedmen were rising to a wealth that even the born aristocrats could not always boast. There came a longing into the hearts of many for "the simple life." It may have been a rather poetic fiction like the Sabine farm of Horace, but it was a genuine feeling. And there was a definite need to moralize and organize the freedman class, which was in danger of growing up without traditions or guidance. Of great interest to us along this line are the efforts made by the popular Cynic-Stoic preachers of the time of Jesus to carry a popular ethical philosophy to the masses of men. Ever since the time of Socrates and Diogenes philosophy had had some tendency to deal with conduct, not on the lofty plane of intellectual analysis suitable for the aristocratic circles of Athens to which Plato and Aristotle spoke, but on the simple plane of vulgar life. The dia-

tribe was one outcome of this. In this form clever, biting sayings were employed to castigate the evils of the day and expose the moral miseries of contemporary manners. This diatribe modified and expanded became the homily, or sermon, proclaimed by the Cynic popular beggar philosopher, who, with rude girdle, barefoot, and all his belongings on his back, with staff and wallet, traversed the world, teaching, denouncing, pleading, and laying the foundations for the sermon which was so soon to enter more fully into the lives of men, and with a more concrete message. The moral teachings of the Cynics, Stoics, and new Pythagoreans are essentially the same. In all are preached continence, asceticism, purity of thought, the simple life, and care for the soul. These wandering philosophers were accepted as father confessors in time of trouble, became spiritual advisers in households, comforted the dying; and the better known ones, like Seneca, became, in a way, house chaplains to the rich and noble.

The most effective of these teachers were preachers and not writers. Musonius and Epictetus did not write—they preached;



and what they preached was religion and ethics rather than philosophy in its more speculative character. They turned also definitely to the rising freedman class with moral reproach and moral appeal, and were the forerunners of the great Christian preachers, like Tertullian and Ambrose, who were so soon to turn the world upside down. And so much did their preaching resemble the Christian message in some of its aspects that it was soon confused with it, and on into our own day that is often proclaimed as Christian ethics which has really been drawn from Roman Stoicism rather than the New Testament. For instance, when Epictetus says, "Seek not to have things happen as you choose them, but, rather, choose them to happen as they do" (*Enchiridion*), he laid the basis for that religious quietism which has more than once lamed the active life of the Church. And when he and the Cynic-Stoics teach, "Death and exile, and all things that appear dreadful, let these be every day before thine eyes. But death most of all: for so thou wilt neither despise nor too greatly desire any condition of life," we have the

essence of the religious morality that still curses the Roman Catholic monastery. There are, however, many points where the Cynic-Stoic popular preaching was in full agreement with Christian teaching and prepared the way for it. Seneca pointed out that the birds lived from day to day with no family fortune, and taught that we should not hate those who did us injury, for, after all, God was teaching us through man's harsh usage.

Nor was their teaching agreeable to the Roman aristocracy. Twice Roman emperors banished "the Stoic philosophers and mathematicians"—that is, the horoscope readers, from Rome (Vespasius in A. D. 74 and Domitius in A. D. 90), how far because there was suspicion of certain individuals, and how far because their teaching was thought dangerous it is impossible to say. But already another force was organizing and training the freedman class, whose ears the Stoic teachers were trying to claim. Nor was it possible for the Cynic-Stoic philosophy to really do more than prepare the way. Its teachings were in reality of an essentially proud, aristocratic, and

individualistic type. It was permeated throughout with an element of flight from the world and scornful self-sufficiency. Its religion lacked warmth and assurance, and it had seemingly no hope of doing more than gaining a few in a perishing world. It lacked dynamic character, and remained in many lives simply a rather cold and unattainable ideal with but little attempt to even put its teachings into practice. Like John the Baptist, it was the greatest among the moral messengers of its passing era, but the least in the kingdom of God was greater than it.

We are not to think, however, of all men at this time as hungering and thirsting after righteousness. The vast mass of men and women live in the atmosphere created for them, and live in really unrationalized content or discontent according to their temperament.

We can see in Roman letters the ordinary decent citizen getting up and making his offering to the gods much as many rather thoughtlessly and mechanically say grace. He went on festival occasions and saw the rites of this or that priestly service in some

temple. He invoked the auguries, swore by the gods, had his own favorite superstitions and his own pet doubts, some of which he was willing to air on occasion, while others he carefully kept to himself. Then when sorrow or death flung shadows over his life he, perhaps, turned to some philosophic teacher, and at times poured out his soul in a touching epitaph that revealed his longing, his doubt, or his final faith. Much of his religious ritual had no more actual connection with his daily life than it is to be feared some nominal Christianity has on the lives of men and women among us. Indeed, much of it had really lost all ethical significance. It was formal and dead, and stood only for a general pious regard for the nation and its past. In part this was well, for the primitive non-morality of the old gods would have been shocking immorality had he tried to imitate it. So the popular philosophic teaching joined with the Jewish synagogue in doing away with the vulgar polytheism, and making ready the way for the proclamation of the one God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Much still remains to be done to make clear the work of the Jewish colonies that were scattered all over the world. The Babylonian exile was evidently not that of a whole people. It probably consisted in the transference of the leading and dangerous elements to Babylon. But remains found on the island of Elephantine, opposite Assuan in Egypt, reveal the fact that a Jewish colony and a Jewish temple—not a mere synagogue—existed there several centuries before Christ. And wherever we turn we find evidences of a large and highly organized Jewish community in every great center of trade and life. This Jewish organization was at once religious, racial, and commercial. It had no navies, but controlled, it is evident, much of the African corn trade. It had no army, but it financed, evidently, many of Rome's military adventures. Its religious prejudices were respected, and though the Jews were unpopular and often the victims of insensate anti-Semitism then as now, its force was felt too high up in political circles to be ever crushed. In B. C. 139 the Roman Senate addressed a letter appeal-



ing for protection for the Jews to the kings of Egypt, Syria, Pergamos, Cappadocia, and Parthia, as well as to Sparta, Delos, Samos, and many other lesser places. The attempts under Tiberius and Claudius to banish them from Rome failed, as their numbers and power were too great. What their numbers were is uncertain. The best guess remains only a guess, but there is some reason for thinking that they formed at least ten per cent of the total population of Egypt, that in Syria they were still stronger, and in Rome somewhat weaker. They carried on an earnest propaganda. Josephus says that in Antioch the Jews attracted a great number of Greeks to their worship, and in a certain sense embodied them in their community life.

There were at this time all degrees of Judaism. Just as in our own day we see all shades from the utmost religious indifference, through various degrees of "reformed" Jews to the closest and most narrow orthodoxy, so the demands of Judaism varied very much from the simple acceptance of the one High God to the religious observance of every detail of an

elaborate ceremonial. Spiritual Judaism in the time of Jesus had risen to the realization that the essentials of the Jewish religion were love to God and to fellow men (Mark 12. 28); and of their foreign converts they demanded varying degrees of conformity to the Mosaic law as interpreted by tradition. Josephus and Philo are also evidences of how far devout and racially loyal Jews could go in meeting the intellectual culture of their age half way. And this circumstance results in there being unquestionably many who are influenced in all shades of degree toward Judaism, and these were made ready for the gospel that was soon to awaken the world.

It is important to bear in mind the changes that took place without much question in Judaism after the destruction of Jerusalem, and particularly after the final overthrow. Judaism seems either to have become narrow and reactionary or to have been much lost in the surrounding cultures, perhaps also to have in part, at least, disappeared in the steadily growing Christian sect. At any rate, it is noteworthy that the breach between Judaism

and Hellenism widened, and that from then on Christianity played much the part that Judaism at one time seemed destined to play as the religion of one God, and a judgment seat, of moral life, and inflexible divine law, with the message of forgiveness and life. And between the splendid colors of Rome's sunset sky, and the pale soft dawning of a new diviner day, was only set the shortness of a summer night. While with timorous anticipation far-seeing prophets watched the inevitable decay of faiths without a future, there was speaking in the lives of rude, uncultured dreamers a more splendid voice, calling men to the conquest of greater and more imperial provinces than those of Octavius or Domitian.

## CHAPTER V

## CHRISTIANITY AND ECONOMICS

## CONTENTS

The military character of barbarism—Christianity and work—Christianity and war—The reorganization of the world—The early economic organization of the Church—The ideals of the freedman class—The effect of Christianity upon the freedman class.

## LITERATURE

For a description of barbarism, see Morgan's "Ancient Society." For the ethics of the age, see Hall's "History of Ethics within Organized Christianity," chapters I to IV. E. Tröeltsch, "Die Soziallehren der Christlichen Kirche," 1912, Vol. I. For the rise of the freedman class, see especially G. Ferrero, "The Rise and Decline of the Roman Empire," 1907-1909. The relation of Christianity to the gospel work has never, however, received an adequate treatment.

NEITHER savages nor animals seem naturally lazy. Their activities, however, are largely controlled by a few central wants. When love, hunger, and thirst are satisfied the main incentives to action cease to operate. The restless creative idealisms of

more highly organized life do not exert their steady pressure to further exertion upon the savage sated with his feast. The rise of private property and the physical disability of maternity have exposed women to an exploitation that has encouraged in the male a contempt for the things he could force women to undertake and an excessive over-valuation of the things he could better accomplish. The vast mass of human life has been probably peacefully organized. It is likely quite a misapprehension to think of savages and barbarians as continually at war. At the same time success in war, when it did take place, gave a military organization a temporary power of incomparable significance. When slavery slowly began to be both more humane and more profitable than wholesale slaughter of the defeated enemy, work was divided into two great categories: that fit for women and slaves and that which alone was honorable for the free fighting male. We are still haunted by many of the ghosts of our cave-dwelling ancestors, and interwoven with our highest religious ideals are still the rags of military



barbarism. The groups of Aristotle and Plato, of Octavius and Tiberius, were aristocratic slave-holding organizations. If one substitutes "gentleman" for "philosopher" in Plato's republic, one realizes keenly how exactly some of his most pronouncedly non-Christian ideals have been cherished fondly by whole classes in a society that honestly mistook itself for Christian.

Christianity arose at a time when slavery was breaking down, and this for the economic reasons we have examined (chapter III, page 65). Christianity never set itself up against slavery. It is easier to quote Stoics than Christians against it until far on to the time of Chrysostom. It did, however, set itself to combat the ideals born of a slave society. Christianity from Second Thessalonians on down through a long and honorable chapter of its history has been the proclaimer of a gospel of industry. To work with his own hands was Paul's pride, and, of course, Galilæan peasants kept no slaves. The stigma that slavery always leaves upon honest labor longest attached to household work—"menial

tasks"—and not even the gospel of industry has as yet removed the prejudice against the "dirty work," although a moment's consideration shows that "dirt" is not the stigma, for what work is more honorable and more dirty than a surgeon's? The stigma is slavery casting its shadows far on into our own day. The freedman class found all the crafts burdened with this reproach. Indeed, productive labor of all kinds was despised under the slave regime, and only the work of "contracting," of war, of administration, of pleading in the law courts and pretending to do it without pay—as was still long pretended afterward—of ruling as officials, or managing large estates worked by slaves, the management of commerce in certain aspects, and engagement in commercial enterprise by indirection, was the work of a "gentleman." Even artists were not quite "gentlemen." Leisure and extravagance, crowds of slaves, and expense in living were the real marks of high breeding and station. The pushing class loaded itself with debt. One like Julius Cæsar had to raise a great sum of money and then leave Rome to recoup

himself if he were to keep his station in life.

The freedman class was bound by its very function to free itself from this burden and stigma. It proclaimed not only the honest character of productive work but its duty and blessing. It was Christianity that came with a religious emphasis upon this truth, and what had come into the teachings of Christianity from Judaism was reënforced by the natural character of the freedman class thinking. It may well be that, for instance, Mithraism was here distinctly inferior to Christianity, for, though we know almost nothing of its ethical teachings, it was the religion of a soldier rather than of a working class, and, as one sees in the time of Julian, made its appeal to the aristocracy rather than to the poor. Whether this be so or not, it certainly is true that in the providence of God this message of Judaism was made vital by Christianity for the great and increasing freedman class, whose industrial life was to give the world a new basis for organization.

Christianity has thus in its history more

than once been in effect an economic brotherhood. It was so in the free city of the Middle Ages, and this development was the direct outcome of the reorganization of the crafts and the craftsman class which was early intertwined with primitive Christianity. The small cultivator remained long "pagan" or a "heathman," and the Roman aristocratic families never very heartily embraced Christianity; but power had passed from both these classes into the hands of those who were now to reorganize life on a non-slave basis as an industrial society. It is extraordinarily difficult to take the ideals and standards of life born of one economic stage and re-adapt them to the new condition of things rendered necessary by economic change. This was the task of Christianity. It took the wandering mobile craftsman class, it organized it in "churches"; it gave it a government by apostles, bishops, and deacons; it raised its independence and its self-respect by making it support its own poor and its own widows and orphans. It laid its emphasis upon property as a means of influence and power. It gave steadiness

and soberness to a class subject to strong temptations. It separated its prosperity from the prosperity of the aristocratic but slave-ridden nobles. In the plays of our period the freedman is represented as making ostentatious attempts to rival aristocracy, and to force himself by his possessions upon the exclusive circles. Christianity stopped that. It gave the freedman a higher interest and a nobler ambition. In fact, it did for the class much what the early evangelical revival did for the rising working class of England, and what Socialism is doing for that class in Germany; it kept the ability of the class from being helplessly absorbed by the possessing class, and it retained that ability for the leadership of a new organization of society in the interests of a wider humanity. Men of the stamp of Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine were much more than ecclesiastics; they were great administrative leaders of a new world-movement. It was not consciously undertaken. The definite social note is almost wholly lacking until Augustine, but it was doing the thing for all that.



And one of the most blessed services that Christianity ever rendered to the world was the spiritualizing and idealizing of labor and industry. This it did heartily and thoroughly. It tried to even place slave labor among the noble and honorable things. This was impossible. Slavery had to gradually disappear, but one of the very things that blinded Christians to the enormity of all slave exploitation was the fact that it tried earnestly to teach men that all labor was holy and honorable, and that the condition of slavery was not in itself any disgrace.

Christianity, again, carried on no self-conscious war with war. Christians became soldiers, and although later Tertullian forbade them wearing the triumphal crown, yet, on the whole, it only taught them to obey more strictly and to fight more bravely. At the same time the morals of the Christian community made a soldier's life a hard one for any of its members, and no wonder that the reproach was soon raised that Christianity was unpatriotic and forbade men to use arms. The injunction, "Resist not evil," was, of course,

never grossly misunderstood in the Orient as it has been in the Occident. At the same time the principle, which cuts far deeper than any literal obedience, was perfectly understood and made demands upon temper and conduct which the soldier found hard to meet. But he tried to meet them, and at a peculiarly critical time of the reorganization of the world's life two religions strove for the Roman army. At first Mithra seemed victorious, but at the last Christianity conquered, and then wherever the soldiers, released from service, settled down on the outskirts of the world, they took with them their religious faith. From North Britain to far-off Asia Minor, along the coast of Africa, and all along the line Christian colonies began to transfer the economic life of the Hellenistic world to great populations who needed just such contact and training.

The Christian soldier was followed by the Christian merchant and craftsman, and one of the great economic services rendered by the rapidly developing Christian organization was the unifying and healing of a vastly disrupted world. Here, again, it

was not the only force at work. Roman officials were often exceedingly honest and zealous in trying to do the same thing. But religion had a hearing the conquering Roman official could never get. Commerce was to be counted as on the same side, but only indirectly, and often its effects were hatred and jealousy.

As far as one can judge at this distance of time, Roman rule in the provinces was like English rule in India; that is, it was successful in establishing peace; it was, on the whole, just and strong; it was an advance on the petty tyrannies and disorder which it superseded, but remained unpopular, and this for good reasons. It was haughty, often intensely ignorant of local conditions; it was, after all is said, a means of exploitation in the interests of a ruling class, and did as does England in India—it divided that it might rule. At this point the young Christian Church began her economic service to the world. She reached down into the divisions of nationality and locality, and economically unified the world in what proved a wonderful way. East and West ultimately parted, but the

use of Latin in all the churches of the Roman communion until this day is only one sign of a work of unification which was economic as well as religious. As then the Roman rule waned in political and military effectiveness, a freedman class, organized, trained in industry, unified in speech in a great degree, with a cosmopolitan consciousness born of world-wide missionary movements, was ready to take over the huge responsibility of transferring the culture of the few to the masses of the world.

The early organization of the Church seems to have been both informal and democratic; that is to say, all had direct voice in the conduct of its affairs. Around about, however, were various types of caste systems, and as the young Church was compelled to more closely organize, two forms were prominently thrust upon them. The Jewish synagogue presented a type of what may be called patriarchal democracy, and the provincial governments a type of municipal hierarchy. As the cities were the centers of Christian activity, the city ecclesiastical officials naturally became the bishops and leaders for the poorer and

more ignorant countrysides. Moreover, the fact that the tradesman freedman class exercised so great an influence gave the city community a distinct predominance in the councils of the early Church. The monastery and hermit had not yet appeared. They offset this somewhat apparently later on. But in the beginning a closely organized episcopal municipal structure was only natural. And this ruling organization was open to all male members. Even slaves could rise to the highest places, and so society was democratized. Even later on in Church history, after the hierarchy had become thoroughly aristocratic, the career of the priest was an open door for the poorer classes to the highest influence in the political world. Thus birth was no longer the sole claim for recognition, and though neither birth nor wealth was any disadvantage, and were often greatly overestimated—as was natural—yet the effect upon the new society must have been exceedingly great. And although never complete the process of democratization of the caste system, in which the world had gotten mired, received its first great impetus. When



one sees how powerless Buddhism has been to greatly affect the caste system of India, one is grateful that Christianity was, at least, one important factor in the destruction of it in Europe to the extent that it has been destroyed.

It is not fair to judge the ideals of the freedman class from the sneers and flouts of the paid literary parasites who have done so much to distort our notions of the time of the Cæsars. Yet it remains probably true that the one thing that seemed to the class needful was money. The vulgarity of our own commercial age has the same roots as the vulgarity at which literary refinement sneered. Wealth took the place of birth as a way to power, and then bought the privileges of birth by buying the penurious daughters of noble families, and by imitation of the wild extravagance of the ruling class. A Christian Puritanism struck effective blows at these false ideals, and wealth was indeed sought, but under limitations of humanity and honesty, and was used as Marcion used his wealth, for the promotion of the Church and the extension of the Christian power.

Nothing but a powerful religious impulse ever seems able to go deep enough into life to change in any really fundamental way the ideals of humanity. And to this most powerful religious appeal the freedman class, and those who joined with it in reorganizing life, gave heed. The ideals soon suffered corruption, but they never sank to the level of the Roman Colosseum or the Hellenic theater; they never permitted the inhumanity of the slave-driven latifundia estates, where four years was almost the limit of human endurance. They never wholly lost respect for honest labor, or wholly surrendered to the low ideals of the marriage relationship prevalent in the aristocratic circles of the ruling class. The Church always protested against the worship of money, and even if her later protests in the vows of poverty of monastic orders remained often ineffective, they never were wholly so. Before the eyes of the new world were set the teachings of Jesus in their incomparable simplicity and divine beauty, and if society as a whole never rose to their level, there were always earnest and insistent souls whose real desire was

to embody those teachings in their conduct, and so the ideals were held aloft from day to day and week by week to the purging and renewing of the life debased and degraded by slavery, oppression, and violence, as well as by greed, ambition, and competitive struggle.

This last element was no small feature in the social demoralization of that day. As long as classes are fairly fixed the competitive struggle may go on within the class, but it always has its limits. As the freedman class began to accumulate wealth and power the competition for the world's honors and high places began to be world-wide and open to all. The desperate character of this struggle is seen in the internal history of the court at Rome. Intrigue, murder, poisoning, violence, base surrender of manhood and womanhood were often the price men and women paid for position and social power. All too often the glittering honors of the world were paid for by nameless and terrible dishonor.

## CHAPTER VI

## CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICS

## CONTENTS

The political helplessness of the early Church—The accommodation of the Church to the times—The effect of persecution upon the Church—The rise of a sacramental organization—The struggle and weakness of this early organization—The place and meaning of the creed—The political hope inherited from Judaism—The city and its tradition in Asia Minor—The political significance of the city in Asia Minor.

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IN the very early apostolic Church the coming of Jesus was eagerly awaited, and at first it was hoped that even before the first generation had passed that coming might be experienced. But we see in the New Testament how as that expectation grew weaker and the growing Church began to turn to the actual life whose ways were known, the teachers of the Church taught the lesson of life's duties gladly taken up. For the most part, political duties had no great place in that early organization. The mass of men belonging to outcast Christianity had no more influence upon politics than a Russian peasant has to-day. Here and there an office-holder might belong to the Church. Now and then one of Cæsar's household might take a secret interest in the little struggling Jewish sect; but any political ambition must have seemed to the Apostolic Church possible only under the forms of Messianic catastrophe. So we see in the Revelations the Jewish forms of thought taken over to express the Christian political hope. It would have been dangerous to say out loud the things of the Roman empire there boldly foreshadowed



had the Apocalyptic language been known to Roman officials; but they were as ignorant of the seditious hopes as England was before the Indian Mutiny of the current seditious gossip of the bazaars. Thus very early political ambitions under the Jewish Apocalyptic forms received sanction from the Church, and as the hope of a speedy coming seemed to wane, as the first apostles began to die, and their places were filled by men who had not known Jesus, the political hope had to gain another character to survive at all.

We have incidentally noticed the fact that in the early literature the gospel message is mainly concerned with the message of redemption for the individual in the ecclesiastical group. Hardly anyone looked out, before Augustine, for a possible redemption of the social organization. It is true that for Tertullian the Roman world seemed eternal. It was, at least, to last until the end of the age; yet even he seems content to have it remain politically an incarnation of pagan life and thought, and the Church was to be a Puritan body within society seeking the redemption only

of the members of the ecclesiastical group.

As the Jewish influence and Apocalyptic vision waned, in consequence of the fall of Jerusalem, we see the Christian Church quite definitely accommodate herself under men like Cyprian and Ambrose to the existing political condition. The political hope of the synagogue was well-nigh gone, and the political intrigues of the Diaspora were now thoroughly discredited. Yet, for all that, the organization was already making itself ready for political action. The shifting of the center of the Church from Jerusalem to Antioch, and from thence to the western coast of Asia Minor, and from there to Rome is one of the difficult chapters in Church history. But the facts stare us in the face and the reasons are not far to guess. Rome was the real center of the world, and as headquarters of the propaganda it was soon the headquarters of the Church. Whether Peter was ever in Rome or not no one knows. The continuity of the tradition weighs but little in the face of the temptation to find Peter there. But Paul was certainly there. The criticism

that seeks to discredit Acts and Paul's letters is sensational hypercriticism and will "go the way." The sure instinct of the early leader chose Rome for the central home of the young informally organized Church, and the political instinct, which is not so much a matter of race as of tradition, was inherited by the early leaders. Already in the time of Nero the Church was strong enough to come under the suspicion of having something to do with the burning of Rome. Nero, at least, was glad to seize the occasion for trying to escape the odium that easily fell to his share. How far he was implicated no one knows. Perhaps infatuated sycophants took his half-expressed wishes for orders. The great ones of the earth do not always need to commit themselves in having their dirty work done for them. Perhaps the Apocalyptic language of Christianity was interpreted to the court and its threats made the occasion for the persecution. It is even barely possible, though highly improbable, that misguided Christians did actually seek to realize the vision of fiery judgment. There seems little doubt that the fire was

the result of conspiracy on the part of some organized group. But the great probability is that Nero was the inciter to the catastrophe.

Persecution did not drive the Church into politics in one sense of the word, but it drove it into close inter-provincial organization. Persecution was sporadic. When it broke out at one place the persecuted members found a home elsewhere. This led to close association and to political life within the organization. It became a training ground for really great organizers and great ecclesiastical political leaders. The sacramental Church became a quasi-secret society with some of the moral dangers that attended that kind of organization. Only the fully initiated could partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and they were, therefore, under solemn vows whose significance was the eternity of everlasting happiness or everlasting pain. As this organization spread over the world it became a political menace by its unity, its refusal to take part in the worship of the emperor, and its resolute attitude of strict obedience to its own bishops

and officers. This was, of course, recognized by even tolerant Rome. Persecution followed after persecution; but, like nearly all persecutions, it only sifted out the ir-resolute and made those left the stronger and more fanatical. We also soon find evidences that individual Christians, at least, followed the example set them and tampered with the officials. There are other ways of yielding political power than by casting ballots, and as the organization grew stronger and stronger a distinct political ambition was bound to appear.

The means to this end could only be by alliance with the strong military central authority. Even when the consummation came the Christian minority would have been too weak to wield the power alone. It was only strong enough to enter into an alliance with Constantine. Yet long before that time individual communities had felt the power of the sacramental Church, organized now most carefully with bishops and elders and deacons and lesser officers, who watched over the whole life of the churchly organization and guarded its interests.




We must neither idealize the early Church after the fashion of an unhistorical High Churchism, nor yet are we to underrate the elements of great primitive moral strength in a Church which, in spite of all the weaknesses brought into it by the untrained and often denationalized and demoralized elements of the empire's underworld, transformed the ideals of the community and left its stamp upon life far beyond the bounds of its official power.

This power in early days was very great. The ban of excommunication could not, of course, be enforced by governmental authority; but the initiated Christian had cut himself off from all other organized social life, and without membership in some organization the obscure member of society, unless very rich, was very helpless. The ban exposed him to all manner of deprivations. The result was that the temptation to form sects within which those under the ban could enjoy the social strength of organization was very great, and so with corresponding vigor the Church laid her emphasis upon the sin of heresy and schism. All the early Christian literature,

from Galatians and the pastoral epistles down through the Teachings of the Twelve Apostles and the works of Ambrose and Cyprian, laid great stress upon the unity of the Church. And very soon the unity sought had this internal political motive. A Marcion was strong enough for a little to break loose from the mother Church and found a sect, but the Church soon began to point out the necessity of a true sacrament and to claim the sole authority to administer the true sacrament. To be without the pale was soon represented as being without any chance for the salvation which was now linked with the sacrament, and so the political unity gathered about baptism and the Lord's Supper.

It is a great mistake to over-estimate the intellectual interest in the early doctrinal statements. The leaders were not so much seeking formulæ that would express the experimental life, as finding authoritative phrases that would guard the true Church from sectarian intrusion, and hedge about the sacrament from the profane and schismatic. Thus one important factor in the formulation of orthodoxy was the in-



ternal political situation, and the early creeds were polemic and exclusive rather than attempts to unite and conciliate. This seems particularly true of the Western Church, which, true to Roman tradition, inherited rather a political than an intellectual character. But even in the Eastern Church the struggle was rather for formulæ that insured ecclesiastical unity than to find truth. The authority of Scripture was hard to appeal to because the allegorical method of interpretation, justified by long misuse, enabled anybody to prove almost anything, so that at last tradition was forced into the foreground and another motive for guarding the purity of the Church as the maintainer of tradition was added. So that the inner life of the Church became a training ground for political activity far more potent than the Roman Senate, and the political life of the civic centers, which had suffered much through Rome's centralization of power, was gradually transferred to the Church, which became the heir to all that the municipalities had gained of political experience and social sagacity.

From Judaism also the Church evidently

inherited not only a political hope but some political tradition. The Jews were never a negligible quantity in measuring the forces of the empire, and the special privileges which they bought or wrung from Rome reveal the power they quietly, persistently, and doggedly used. Eusebius tells of wars carried on by the Jews against the Greeks in Cyrene, Alexandria, and Egypt generally, and evidently knows other authority than Dion Cassius for his statements. The losses on both sides are said to have run up into the thousands, and Trajan had to send one of his best and most favorite generals with foot, cavalry, and a naval force to carry on a war against them which lasted a long time. It also led to clearing the province of Mesopotamia of them, in which again a great multitude were said to have been slain. All this shows how highly organized Judaism was, and to this organization the Christian Church undoubtedly became heir, for it is evident from the apologists that the bitter feeling against the Jews on the part of Christians, and of Christians against the Jews, was not by any means universal, and that far on into



the third and fourth century Jews became Christians often in considerable numbers. Close organization was necessary for self-protection, and soon officials did not know whether or not they had in their following those who belonged to the new sect. Each returning persecution called attention to the need of political power, and it is only natural that the Church longed for a final victory over the Roman state, and the time when their numbers would be so great that the political power should yield. Already in the time of Trajan Pliny the younger asserts that the temples were deserted and there was no market for the fodder of sacrificial victims. It was, therefore, no wild hope that the organization might become a political might, for a state without a religion was almost unthought of; and Christians began to insist ever more strenuously upon its sole claim and its exclusive character. Throughout the literature of the second century is a note of sure and speedy triumph, and all triumph was more or less linked with some political expression.

Thus it is not too much to say that from every side the early Christian Church



was driven into political action: the Messianic tradition, the Jewish inheritance of political power, the tradition of the city in Asia Minor, and the general acceptance on the part of all as a general truth that religion was a state matter, and that it was the state's duty to protect true religion and repress the false. Even the early Christians did not complain of the state's persecution of false religions, but only of not seeing that Christianity was true. Anything like our doctrine of conscious toleration of various religions was foreign alike to Judaism, paganism, and Christianity. Just how soon the early Christian Church was sufficiently organized to in any way effectively interfere in political action it is impossible to say. It must be remembered that political pressure was not exercised as it is to-day; it was by organized public opinion, whose last resort was public riot and disturbance. That Christianity soon took part in such disturbances is seen early in its history in North Africa, and later on the monks and hermits were exceedingly turbulent elements in the communal life of the young Eastern Church.

Thus we look out at a world that it is hard for us now to understand, and we constantly attribute to the early Church both virtues and vices which were not existent, because the point of view was so entirely different from our own.

## CHAPTER VII

## THE CHURCH IN THE HOUSE

## CONTENTS

Paul's churches and their meeting places—Pliny and his description of Christians to Trajan—The Church and exorcism—The Church and hospitality—The question of church buildings—The method of propaganda—The central message—The Old and New Testaments as foundation for a new culture.

## LITERATURE

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THE little bands of Christians so soon organized into churches met at first and for many years at the houses of the wealthier or more important members. Twice Paul greets his converts in the name of Aquila

and Priscilla and "the church which is at their house." The Orient is changing, but one can still see towns and villages that substantially reproduce the conditions of life that then prevailed. We see the narrow, ill-kept streets; the houses huddled rather irregularly together, both for security and for shade. Awnings cover the doorway at which Paul works at the simple loom on which the famous tentcloth is woven for which Tarsus was renowned. The house is low, but has an upper story in which there are no partitions, so that a goodly number can squat, crowded together as only Orientals can crowd together; and in the corner sits the presiding elder, or apostle. The officers of the little fellowship are quite numerous, but some of the many names really denote the same office or duty, only the local designation differs. There are apostles, elders, bishops, deacons, deaconesses, prophets, teachers, exorcists, and keepers of the door. The local organization follows the outline of either the synagogue or perhaps some guild fellowship, or some mystery cult, or the organization of the political community in which the Church

takes its rise. Slowly the type of the synagogue gives way to a more central organization, and the separation between the Church and the synagogue becomes ever more complete.

The meetings are at all hours—early in the morning, when alone slaves and servants are free; and, again, late at night, when at last even the ceaselessly industrious Oriental stops working and pauses to chat and argue. We may well imagine the impression the little Church made upon Pliny before he sent his celebrated letter to Trajan. With the interest in personal observation which caused the death of his uncle during the outburst of Vesuvius, we can imagine him finding out that some slave of his was one of these denounced Christians. We may see him sending for his slave. He was personally a kindly and just man. His assurances to his slave might easily gain the slave's confidence, and Pliny, perhaps, himself arranged to visit a meeting of the Christian fellowship. He flings a mantle over his Roman garb, and steals with his slave to the meeting place where an "apostle" is to preach.



The doorkeepers are aware that a high-born Roman is coming, but that he has promised that no harm shall come of his visit, and perhaps good. One may see the haughty cultured Roman patrician, who even in his disguise is patently of the power-possessing class. In spite of James's injunction and the feeling of class jealousy, way is made for him, and the best place the humble room affords is his. The meeting begins with prayer, and then the wailing chant, borrowed from the synagogue, is joined in by all. Some one reads a message of encouragement from a venerated leader. Another recites a prophecy from the Old Testament. Then the "apostle" begins his homily and the coming new æon is his theme. They are warned as Paul does in Romans to obedience to the powers that be; but one reason for patience and obedience is the fact that these are all passing away. The Messiah is coming in power and glory. The poor will be made rich, the rich and mighty but unbelieving will be cast down. Justice, mercy, peace, and plenty will be the portion of the poor and the oppressed. In the meantime all are to

live in love, in truth, in chastity, and honesty. They are to work with their hands. Labor is no disgrace; the Lord Christ became a house-builder, and Paul a tentcloth weaver. The cross, the atoning sacrifice, the resurrection of the God-Man are lifted up, and baptism is explained and proclaimed.

The proud Roman is half amused and half bored. He looks about upon the motley gathering of slaves, freedmen, working-men, longshoremen; here and there a Jew or an Arab; women who mingle in unwonted freedom with the rest are acting as deaconesses and report cases of hardship and suffering. Then the hour for work draws nigh and the bread and wine for the morning meal are produced. This love feast is preceded by the sacramental eating and drinking of special portions set aside. A hymn is again chanted in the wailing monotone of the East, a prayer and benediction by the oldest disciple follows, and not all together, but by twos and threes the company steals away. And Pliny smiles at it all. They teach no better and no worse than the vulgar but

often hypocritical and objectionable Cynics, and as for their gathering being a danger to the Roman empire it is simply absurd. So he writes to Trajan his general impression, and Trajan writes back that though the Christians are not to be sought after, they are, nevertheless, a forbidden fellowship, and when actually proved stubborn and unrepentant are to be punished.

In the meantime the Church at the house harbors the "apostle," who, of course, is not one of the twelve, but a wandering teacher who has once seen the Lord. He tells the inside circle of his many adventures, and finds out how the cause is progressing. If the church is well to do, he gathers a collection for a poorer congregation; and all day he wanders from bazaar to bazaar finding his fellow Christians, speaking a word to them, hearing of difficulties and disputes, and resolving questions of loyalty and orthodoxy. At night he meets all the elders at the home of the presiding elder or bishop, who administers the affairs of the local church and keeps it in touch with all the churches round about. Measures are discussed for spreading the

“good news.” The signs of the times are eagerly discussed. The tragic end of Nero, the murder of Servius Galba, the violence of the brief reigns of Otho and Vitellius, and the horrors of the civil wars all encourage them to believe that indeed the last times are at hand; and the lull that followed under Vespasian, to be succeeded by the awful fall of Jerusalem, and the rise to the throne of Jerusalem’s conqueror are all things that speak of the coming triumph and the revealed glory of the crucified and risen Master. For the earliest hopes of the Church at the house were, indeed, of heaven and personal salvation, but also of the triumph here on earth of Him whose defeat on the cross was but the passing prelude to the resurrection and final coming in triumphant glory.

But it was not only argument that spread the good tidings. It was a demon-haunted world, and men and women were “possessed.” Luke and the early Christian literature do not make sharp distinctions between lunacy and possession. All the primitive Church knew was the actual fact, which remains a fact to-day in pagan



Korea or in Christian America, that the Christian message brought deliverance, and men who were "possessed" of evil passions and wicked spirits became clean and sane and wholesome. Diseases were healed, wonders were wrought. We may explain as we please, and discount both the narratives of the primitive Churches—and without question much was uncritical and perhaps exaggerated—and discount also the phenomena themselves; but of one thing we may be sure, which is that the faith of the Church was built upon these "wonders and signs," and that the moral healing was then, as it is to-day, the most marked and most permanent witness to the power of the good tidings. So the church in the house had its exorcists and healers, who prayed and taught and rescued men and women from despair and sin and delusions, and, freeing them from bondage, gave them the liberty of the sons of God.

So the church in the house was full of joy and peace and happiness. "Rejoice evermore" was one of Paul's admonitions, which he no doubt repeated many times. The joy of Jesus Christ, which made men



call him a winebibber and a friend of publicans and sinners, was the joy of the early Church. They had dark moments. The struggle with ugly passions marked even Paul's church at Corinth; strife and theological dispute distracted the little community from its real business, yet, on the whole, we see a new movement full of triumph, of joy, of enthusiasm for holiness, chastity, and the loving life. We see a freed-man class learning a real freedom, and being trained by moral activity for the reorganization of the world.

The church in the house was the center of an organized hospitality. The prophet, teacher, healer, apostle, or plain Christian craftsman knew where he could ask almost as a right for hospitality as he wandered about the world. This hospitality was abused, but even abuse could not suppress it; and from sea to sea, and from north to south there journeyed from the church at the house of Nymphas to the church at the house of Cynthia or Aquila and Priscilla a stream of wandering Christian craftsmen with a new life and new enthusiasm and a new and inspiring hope.

When the church in the house began to give place to buildings set apart for assembly and worship it is hard to say. After Trajan's edict the religion was formally a forbidden religion, and although Christians were not to be hunted for, nor was the evidence of informers or anonymous persons to be taken, yet no such public demonstration as a building owned by the fellowship could have been at first tolerated. Yet long before Diocletian church buildings stood in the name of Christianity, which were then destroyed during the last fierce attempt to put Christianity down. From Trajan to Diocletian the persecutions were sporadic and local, but often exceedingly severe, and sometimes very wide-spread. For such times there existed secret places where the fellowship met by arrangement, and the catacombs, in some instances, sheltered them. The ancient city was also supplied with shops and meeting places where such gatherings could be held; and yet from hints dropped it may be assumed that far down the age after Christ the church in the house of this or that well-known Christian played a still important role.

Nor must we suppose that even in times of peace, when no persecution threatened, the meetings were open as with us. Only those fully initiated could even witness the sacramental meal, and even to the assembly some sort of an introduction was needed. The propaganda was not, apparently, even mainly carried on by such seasons of worship. In public places apostles and teachers preached and spoke, and then sought out their audience and their opportunity. Working men spoke to their fellow craftsmen, and when confidence had been gained, and perhaps not until then, was an invitation extended to join the assembly under the protection of the fellow workman, who is trying now to convert the visitor to the new faith. This hand-to-hand work was going on all over the empire. It might perhaps be a servant who was laboring with a fellow servant, or even with a master or mistress.

It is not well to idealize the gospel as it was then preached. The moral and spiritual level of Paul's letters could not be maintained. So the Christian literature shows signs of very speedy degeneracy.

Superstition mingled with the worship. Lower motives led men into the Christian communion than the love for God as seen in Jesus Christ. The writings of the third generation show already sad misapprehension of the real lesson of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Crass heresy of one kind or another gained entrance and degraded the conception of God. Baptism and the sacrament began to be used as an external and unethical magic. Even in Acts and Paul's letters we see how densely ignorant and unspiritual was often the early little Church. How could it be otherwise?

On the other hand, no more effective educational agency was at work than the church in the house. *It was a book religion.* More than once the authorities tried to destroy the Christian books, for they recognized how the Church was organized on a literature. To understand that literature was an education. To-day the English version of those books has made ignorant men cultured leaders of English life. The church in the house was a school as well as an assembly; and the letters of the

leaders were passed from hand to hand and from church to church. The understanding of the Old Testament meant a growing intelligence and a widening horizon. The Greek version was, naturally, the one known and used, and in spite of the growing fear and dislike of the Jews the Church held fast to the Scriptures of the Old Testament and gave us our priceless heritage.

To it were added gradually the letters of the great leaders; Paul's letters, letters perhaps by his followers, who report their understanding of his preaching (Hebrews); letters dictated, it may be, in part by him with greetings added by his scribe (Romans 16 written by Tertius); letters that, being sent by "John," were circulated without men knowing surely, even into our own critical day, whether this was the old apostle or a presbyter of the same name and high reputation. Some letters were regarded as doubtful as late as Eusebius (A. D. 324), like Second Peter, but were included at last. It is wonderful how great a gap separates the canon thus slowly chosen from the literature that comes im-



mediately after. There are books outside the Old Testament canon one might wish included, like Ecclesiasticus, but there is actually no early Christian book coming in any sense near to the canonical literature, or that could be mistaken for one of the original documents. James's letter was unjustly judged, on the whole, by Luther, although from his point of view it was not "evangelical," and the "Revelation" has so much that is Jewish and hard to understand that many—again including Luther—have doubted its value in the canon; but who now would wish to take either one out? That literature alone lifted the whole cultural level of the church in the house and gave it an historical significance greater than the portico of Athens, or the schools of Rome.

The original synagogue was a school of sacred letters, and now the church in the house took over on a still broader basis the task of teaching an ignorant class out of as fine a literature as the world has preserved to us. Later on, as in Augustine and the scholastics of the Middle Ages, the culture of the Hellenistic world was in

large part added. But in the earlier stages, and for many even on into later times, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments remained the source of any culture they possessed and the guardian of the religion and conduct of the Christianized many.

## CHAPTER VIII

## THE CHANGING GOSPEL HOPE

## CONTENTS

The inclusive character of the Roman imperialism—The powers still left to organizations within the empire—The rising power and importance of the Christian organization—Reasons for this—The formation of an ecclesiastical machine—The rise of creed and dogma—The gradual change in the message of the Church—The variety of needs the gospel met—The rise of schisms and factions—The gradual rise of an imperial emphasis—The success of Roman Catholicism and its weakness.

## LITERATURE

The inclusive character of the Roman empire is brought out by Ernest Renan, "*Marc-Aurèle et la fin du Monde antique.*" Consult also R. von Jhering, "*Der Geist des römischen Rechts,*" 1891. On the rise of the Church, see Gibbon's famous one-sided chapter in his "*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*" For the rise of schisms, see A. Hilgenfeld, "*Ketzergeschichte des Urchristentums,*" 1884. For the rise of the papacy, A. Ritschl's "*Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche,*" 2d edition, 1857.

It is not easy for us to understand an

organization of society in which such great powers were intrusted to little governments within the great government as in the Roman empire. The father of a family had the power of life and death over his "family," including the slaves and minor children under that term. Gradually the children were excepted, because the mother belonged to another "gens," and so imparted to her children the quasi freedom of another "gens." Then, under Stoic influence and the rising tide of humanity, slaves began to enjoy some measure of protection by public opinion from outrageous cruelty. In the same way other groups besides the family group possessed great powers of discipline. The synagogue even had for certain purposes and in some places the power of life and death left to it over its own members. In Jerusalem, at the trial of Jesus, Pilate bids the Jewish leaders judge the accused "according to their own law," but they disclaim the power of life and death, although in Acts Stephen is reported as having been stoned as the result of legal process before the chief priest, with witnesses "consenting unto

his death," among whom were those who, like Paul, cannot have been merely part of a mob. So also various guilds, associations, and religious cults seem to have exercised exceedingly wide powers over the lives and conduct of the members. No doubt this was often only by tacit consent. There was always in the background an appeal to a more political type of court; but custom is often much stronger than law, and the tyranny of a quasi-voluntary group may be far more searching and effective in its violence and constraint than the tyranny of men set over the group, but not of it. So we find early in the history of the little Christian community a group discipline gradually being established. The story of the Apostle Peter and Ananias and Sapphira reveals the "great fear" that came upon all the Church when any act of patent disloyalty to the group exposed a member to the censure of the society.

It is at this point also that indirectly persecution strengthens a group life. The Christian Church soon discovered and developed the "ban." Paul called for its exercise in the case of the church at Corinth,



and, apparently, with almost immediate results. Of course the fear of the loss of the soul must ever be a tremendous instrument of power in the hands of those who claim the power to decide the destiny of the soul. To-day we are so far Protestant that few feel that actually any man has this power. But in Roman Catholic communities it is still strangely effective even in the case of highly intelligent men and women. Yet this alone would not have made the "ban" effective in many cases had there not been other considerations. A persecuted group cuts off its membership from social contacts outside its own circle. The social-democratic working man in Germany in the old days was wholly dependent upon his social-democratic fellows for the companionship and contacts which really constitute life. The foundations were then laid for the iron discipline which has made the party the strongest single party in Germany. Much the same thing was happening in the young Christian Church. There also persecution knit the community together, and anyone who joined the inner circle of the Church became

dependent, and absolutely dependent, upon the group for all the intimate associations which make life worth living. Moreover, in that age, and in the Orient even now, life is endangered unless the individual is known to have a family or group or trade guild ready to represent him and his interests. Group solidarity plays a large part in all life, but in days when it was the only protection a humble member of society had against tyranny above him and crowding competition about him, it meant life and death to maintain good standing in the protecting group.

Moreover, persecution made the early Christian Church secret, hence again its power became gradually an intangible and uncertain thing. Its "ban" had an unknown and indefinite reach. Wherever the member under the censure of his group would go he found already that the hostile attitude had preceded him, and he was cut off from his natural protectors, and they were now his enemies and accusers. That this power was abused we have ample evidence. And one result was the endeavor of any founder of a new schism, who was under the "ban,"

to enlarge his following as much as possible so as to become independent of the mother group. This caused the most bitter feeling between factions fighting for "regularity," each faction seeking the support of the largest number of outside groups. The struggles in labor circles to-day afford an admirable commentary upon the early Christian history. Nor were these struggles all in vain. They had a high value in raising the intellectual level of the early Church and in compelling the leaders to face very definite doctrinal issues.

The outcome, however, was the gradual rise of an ecclesiastical machinery strong enough to settle the disputes, and so closely organized that its power reached over first the province, then at last over the whole Church. The rise of this priestly power we may follow step by step. It began very early. The pastoral epistles are still in the atmosphere of a firm but loving brotherhood. When we come to the Ignatian epistles and to Cyprian we have already the outlines of an imperial hierarchy strong enough in the days of Constantine to co-

operate with the state, and in the time of Leo and Gregory to dominate it.

This process could not go on without serious loss. However necessary in a certain sense the process seemed to be, it was unfortunate in its effects upon the early gospel and its contents. Even a casual acquaintance with Roman Catholic theology reveals the fact that its source is not the New Testament. Nor does it do to forget that the Roman Catholic Church makes no such claim. The Church itself had and has the right to formulate dogmas. The faith of the early Church was very definite, but it was not formulated into dogmas. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were tremendous realities to the most primitive Church, and even if the formula is an addition to Matthew and a textual error in the letter of John, nevertheless, the teaching is certainly as old as our oldest Gospel. But it had not hardened into any philosophic dogma. In the same way the unity of God and the doctrine of an everlasting life belonged to the very essence of the early gospel, but dogmas of a purgatory and the descriptions of heaven

and hell, so common in the corruptions of the Middle Ages, were altogether lacking.

The central message of the early gospel was the Messianic character of Jesus attested by his resurrection and the coming "reign of God." Both of these ideas were preached in the language of the Old Testament, and the apocalyptic literature that has in the Old Testament its best representative book is Daniel. As a written New Testament arose we see in Matthew 24 and in Revelation how the thought and feeling of this apocalyptic message was taken over. The message to the early Church was rather to prepare for and then await the transformation of society than to actually go about its overthrow and reconstruction. At the same time the overthrow and reconstruction was the early hope, and the Messiah was expected to come and judge and overthrow.

As the Church prepared and waited and the Messiah did not come, it reverted to the parables and words of Jesus in which the kingdom is thought of as yeast, and described as growing as a tree or a seed (Matthew 13). The disclaimer of Jesus



as to any knowledge of times and seasons was remembered; the early Church began gradually to adapt her life to the existing conditions, and to see in a rapid and universal conversion of all men a new hope for the world. Then it became manifest how many different wants and religious needs the gospel of Jesus as Saviour was able to meet. Dreamy mystic natures found in his teachings food for their spiritual life. Paul and John gave many such a tongue and a new hope. Plain matter-of-fact men and women, to whom life was just "doing things," found Jesus teaching them what to do, and such a book as James ministered to them. Sin-burdened hearts found Jesus a forgiving life and revelation of a forgiving God, and found a new hope and new content for their souls. Men in doubt and ignorance found his word as brought to them a revelation of life and death, and saw in it an answer to the cosmic questions no science had in any satisfactory way answered. Thus the message of Jesus was then, as now, a word to vastly different natures, and as each took "treasures new and old," each one supposed he had the

whole gospel, and because he knew his need and felt how Jesus had met it, thought that his explanation of the gospel was the only real explanation of it.

In another chapter we have noted the intense speculative interest that had been awakened in men's minds. Perhaps the world seemed now so big to them that the whole *cosmos*, or universe, began to take a place once unknown in men's thought. Christianity was eagerly taken up by many who wove it into a great cosmic drama, in which Light and Darkness struggle for victory, and in which at last God overcomes, in and through suffering, the demon of darkness. This was no merely non-religious curiosity. Men were asking, seriously, "What reason have we for thinking that the evil will be overcome?" The splendid story of the temptation of Jesus, which must have come from his own lips, was the ground of assurance. Jesus had overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. He was with the Father, having risen from the dead. So men and women began to speculate, sometimes wildly and heretically, sometimes soberly and usefully, upon the

meaning of that most wonderful story of the ministry of Jesus. So arose theology, and to many that was what the message of Jesus meant, and that was his real revelation.

On the other hand, there was a large community oppressed and ground down by taxes and military tyranny. To them Jesus was the Conqueror and Deliverer. The "meek," the *poloi* or *ockloi*, or *am hareez*, were to inherit the earth. The churches that Paul had founded everywhere were to at last rule where now they were persecuted; and so a political ambition began to take root in men's minds, and the success of the Church meant to many the whole of the Christian message, and this Church as the body of Christ was the new revelation.

The wonderful thing is the vast variety of real religious need which the teachings of Jesus met and satisfied, and how on into our own day all may see in him and his message the bread for their own hunger. To weary and discouraged men and women, ready to perish, he was the assurance of eternal life. At the grave and in the midst of death his claim, "I am

the resurrection and the life," spoke the comfort no theology and no temporal triumph on earth could give; and to these the revelation of Jesus was not of earth at all, but of heaven, and heaven alone.

To some, as to Paul, it was not heaven or even an earthly paradise, or a new speculative cosmic system, but the freedom of the new life that made Jesus a real revelation of God. What the law could not do Jesus did. The law said, "Be righteous," but Paul found Christ Jesus giving him power to do righteousness; he was the dynamic that made the righteous life possible, not by works of obedience, but by grace and faith.

Now, one weakness of this situation was, of course, that one-sided and narrow interpretations of Jesus Christ began to demand exclusive right within the Church. Hence arose schisms and factions. Each laid claim to be the only proclaimer of the "true" gospel. The wonderful broad-mindedness of Paul gave place often to narrow and exclusive definitions of the new faith. The outward organization was imperiled, and so to save itself the Church



as an outward organization began partly to claim more power, but just as often to have power forced upon it. Thus there arose an outward visible body claiming to be the body of Christ and to have the power to alone say what was a true Church of Christ. We are always compelled from time to time to define, but no definition can do more than describe anything as it looks from one angle. Hence the new definitions often made the Church cut off some who should have been in it and included some who were great weaknesses to it. The gospel was thus constantly in danger of ceasing to be God's life as revealed in Jesus Christ, saving men and women in all their deepest needs, and becoming a definition or a sacrament, a cult or a social reform, a political ambition or a merely amiable form of culture.

This process, moreover, was greatly stimulated by honest persons who saw in the growing power of the young Christian Church a chance to identify it with some favorite definition or theology, or perhaps with some cult or social reform. Nor were there lacking those who promised



themselves power and political importance by taking up the growing cause of the gospel. So it happened that the historical setting of the early gospel was one of increasing confusion to many minds, and we soon hear complaints that Christianity cannot be defined, and is so loose a term that its followers cannot agree upon what it really stands for. After the fall of Jerusalem the Messianic hope which had given such new vitality to Judaism, as seen in the apocalyptic literature, must have seemed to the scattered Jews of the Hellenic world either a dream from which men had awakened, or they sought in some cult or philosophy or in Christianity the satisfaction of their religious yearnings. Some settled down to the historic pre-Christian Judaism, and thus the Christian Church definitely began to separate itself from such synagogues, and to formulate its gospel in order to hedge itself off from the Judaism of the thora, or law.

In the time of Justin Martyr (A. D. 104) the Church was struggling still against Judaism, but the general feeling was of victory over Judaism and that the real adjustment

was henceforth rather with heathen philosophy. Now, no such struggle goes on without a measure of adaptation to the position of the antagonist, and a more or less conscious attempt to fight fire with fire. Christianity thus accepted political organization borrowed from persecuting Rome, philosophic terms and definitions borrowed from the pagan teachers she controverted, rites and usages from cults she condemned and so completely displaced that we are only to-day recovering their history.

This process meant in many ways an essential transformation of the gospel from the simplicity of the good news of Jesus to the elaborate theology, ceremonial, and political organization of the Roman Catholic Church. Nor had the great scholars of the Reformation period the tools with which an historical separation could be made between this radical innovation and the simple saving faith. Not even the evangelical revival has given us back a Christianity clearly separated from the Roman Catholic accretions. Nor have we any hard-and-fast rule that can tell us what elements are wholesome although without question

later historical additions, and what elements are dangerous intrusions upon the Christian faith. For instance, the keeping of a Christian year, so called, is an adaptation of the old pagan astronomical cycle, with its myths and poetry. The growing Church simply took this over, and filled the place of the myth with Christian story. The whole development was after the New Testament canon was closed. Paul had a well-grounded fear of the Jewish year, with its feasts, Sabbaths, new moons, and days. But he had no reason to think that Christmas and Good Friday and Easter would take the place in the new religious life they have taken, and we do not know what he would have said to it. Jesus going away promised the Spirit to guide us into all truth, and changing conditions need constantly new formulations and new organizations. The main fault with the early Church was that it began to assert the monopoly of the Spirit, and to identify the authority of the Church, or the Council, and ultimately of the Pope, with God. From this Protestantism has definitely broken, and so all these new additions and

transformations must be reverently and carefully tested whether they be of God or no. And what is true of days and rites is also true of all doctrinal accretions borrowed from the Roman Catholic Church. We neither accept them on the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, nor do we reject them because they were first taught within her bounds. We try the spirits, whether they be of God or no. This was not the way of primitive Christianity. It had no really critical processes. The simple rule was that that was true which everybody, everywhere, had always accepted as true. Hence as historical criticism was not born, many things slipped in as "universally" held which were really pagan innovations, and many merely individual opinions became the accepted orthodox faith. Rites, ceremonies, cults came, in large part, from Egypt, Asia Minor, and Persia, and dogmas and philosophy, in large part, from the Hellenistic world.

The transformation in the early gospel was from relative simplicity to elaboration, from comparative elasticity to a certain fixedness. It had to be useful for political

purpose, and so, again, the social and political setting influenced its transformation. From the time of Augustus on the Roman imperialism ceased largely to battle for slaves and booty. The world had relative peace, and during that time the gospel spread as the messenger of a growing organization which was to prove itself even as a political force mightier than the kingdom of the Cæsars.



## CHAPTER IX

## SUMMARY

The analogy between our questions of to-day and those of the early Church—The main services the Church rendered—The early gospel and the freedman class—The importance for our own day of a knowledge of the historic setting of the gospel.

THUS briefly we have reviewed in outline the historical setting of the early gospel. We have seen a striking analogy between the world to which Jesus spoke and our own day. And, in spite of the great differences in many outward conditions, we have seen that before the Christian Church to-day there is set something of the task the Church confronted in the first centuries of its history. Religion has never been, and never can be, "nonpolitical." It has been the greatest political and social bond in all the ages. Where the early Church made its first great political blunder was its compromise with power for the sake of

power. It was always bound from that on to consult the state in regard to its own soul, and thus lost its soul. The temptation Jesus resisted his Church surrendered to. Where he refused for the sake of empire to bow to the tempter, the Church willingly made obeisance and found the inwardness of her life imperiled and her freedom gone. We dare not judge too harshly. To exchange persecution, dishonor, and secrecy for public recognition, privilege, and power seemed so dramatic a victory for Christ and his cross that we would no doubt also have gladly exchanged the historic setting of those early years of struggle for the prospect of power and peace. And yet those early years were wonderful years, and, in spite of all ignorance, misunderstandings of the simple gospel, and compromises with much that was poor and really pagan, the Church won great victories, and did a work of education and organization for which she must always be remembered.

We have seen that the Church of the first three centuries was not perfect. It was a time of continuous and increasing clouding of the gospel. It was a time of compromise

and unwitting surrender of many values. On the other hand, it was also a time of great creative energy. The forms and phases of that early life are still our heritage. Even when we must interpret some of the phrases into our modern vernacular, and use the forms with a primitive freedom and independence, we yet must feel the overwhelming sense of our obligation, and must learn the lessons of those early years. One of the important lessons is the function of religion as not only a social bond but as pilot in the midst of all social changes. The great factor in the history of the years following Augustus was the economic adjustment of society in transition from a slave-capturing, slave-holding community to an ordered crafts and small agricultural era, with its developing feudal character. This change was almost made possible by the work of the Christian Church. She acted as educator, friend, organizer, and inspirer of the class that was slowly struggling for recognition. She did then for her age what the Methodist Church did for England's working class under the inspiration of John Wesley. She did what the Roman com-

munion could have done and failed to do before the French Revolution. It is of the greatest importance, therefore, that we understand the historical setting of the early gospel, that we may duly appreciate its mission and most important contribution to the history of culture.

The early gospel did not and could not change the freedman class into a group of philosophers on the intellectual level of Plato or Aristotle. It did not and could not make of its heterogeneous elements an artistic society on the same plane with Phidias and Polyclitus, but it gave the world Byzantine art, and the noble inspirations of the Middle Ages, and spread abroad a culture on a far wider basis than any slave society could furnish. It prepared also the way for a political society, free in a sense that no ancient society could ever have been free. It gave, as well, the basis for a new ethics and new standards of conduct. We have never worked out those standards. When the early gospel compromised with political power it accepted political law and pagan philosophy as the basis of its outward codes, to the

lasting damage of Christian ethics. It coöperated, indeed, with Cynic-Stoicism to ennoble and enrich the legal ethics of the age. Yet these remained in their substantial outline pagan and not Christian, and remain in good part pagan on into our own day. Here, again, the historical setting of the gospel is of supreme interest, for it enables us to see, in part at least, just where and why the standards of conduct of the early Church came to so vastly differ from the early and simpler Christian ideals.

Only in its historic setting can we try to separate those elements in the Christian evolution which have permanent meaning for us from those which belong to the passing stage of culture and the temporary level of the intelligence of the day. The message of Jesus was that God was in life and had become incarnate in humanity. The splendid faith of Christianity was that it had seen God in Christ Jesus and that God called men to be perfect as God was perfect. This opens the way to vast vistas of still further change and progress. And the early Christian Church felt with Paul that



Jesus Christ was more than a hero and martyr, more than a teacher, or even friend; that he was a power abiding in life, and filling every life that came to him with new meaning and new graciousness.

We need to study the early gospel in its setting that, marking its power, we may do with it in our day what God sets us to do. It still has its old capacity for awakening new ideals, new hopes, and new longings. It still makes men discontented with self and social selfishness. It is still raising men and women from the dead and calling all men to a higher life.









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